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Weird Tales

ALL STORIES NEW—NO REPRINTS

JULY, 1950 Cover by Matt Fox

NOVELETTE

SHALLAJAL . . . . . Arthur J. Burks 18

The greatest indictment of man is that animals, birds and snakes fear him. He even fears his own kind; often he fears himself. That was why they had come to the Sea of Glass.

SHORT STORIES

THE WEIRD TAILOR . . . . . Robert Bloch 6

Only a connoisseur of horrors would have appreciated the tailor's window dummy.

THE RHYTHM OF THE RATS . . . . . Eric Frank Russell 40

"Some day we shall deal with this horror as our forefathers dealt with the witch that bore him. . . ."

REBELS' REST . . . . . Seabury Quinn 50

They said that ghosts walked in the cemetery after sunset. Ghosts of the men who lay in Rebels' Rest.

WOE WATER . . . . . H. Russell Wakefield 55

Only ten anonymous letters that morning—the rush was over. But as one pointed out, Angela had always been afraid of water.

CORDONA'S SKULL . . . . . Mary Elizabeth Counselman 62

There is a horrible sort of anonymity about a skull—yours, mine, anybody's.

THE CLOSING DOOR . . . . . August Derleth 72

He had been warned to have the church clean by sundown—but still he couldn't help but be disconcerted in the dusk by the door which never could be propped open.

MRS. HAWK . . . . . Margaret St. Clair 78

. . . . Mrs. Hawk had much to offer a prospective husband—beauty and a prosperous pig farm.

FLY DOWN DEATH . . . . . Cleve Cartmill 83

He had his faults; his mother admitted it when he was a child. And that was 500 years ago.

VERSE

THE CITY . . . . . H. P. Lovecraft 48

PATTERN . . . . . Dorothy Quick 61

WEIRDISMS . . . . . Lee Brown Coye 77

THE EYRIE 93

WEIRD TALES CLUB 4

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The Weird Tailor

BY ROBERT BLOCH

Either he was working for a crazy man . . . or a practitioner of Black Magic.

ONLY a connoisseur of horrors would have appreciated Erik Conrad's window dummy.

It had been a cheap model to begin with—and the passage of twenty years had not improved its crudely moulded features, its awkward stance, or the general air of clumsiness inherent in face and form. There was something grotesque about the dummy, as if it had been created by the alien art of another world; as though a life-term from Outside had deliberately set about to model a "man" from a poor woodcut in an ancient book.

The brash smile, the jaunty little mustache, and the open candor of the staring blue eyes had all suffered the gnawings of Time, so that now the figure was minus an upper lip, the left corner of the mustache, and the entire right eye. A crack extended from the empty eye-socket up to the crown of the head and split the marcelled hair directly along the indented part.

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A chipped finger and a nick in the left wrist contributed to the gruesome aura of decay.

Certainly the suit Erik Conrad had draped over the dummy was just the garment which would be selected for the cheap client of a cheap mortician. It was eminently appropriate to the corpse-like pallor of the window dummy, but the effect of the ensemble was well calculated to disturb the eyes of the sensitive observer.

Fortunately, Erik Conrad was not overly imaginative. He didn't mind the sight of the leering dummy slumped in the shadows at one corner of his dingy little tailoring establishment. He was not affected by the spectacle of its hideously progressive decay, any more than he was affected by his own.

For the years had not dealt kindly with Erik Conrad, merchant tailor. He had suffered a disintegration comparable to that of the dummy since setting up a shop of his own on this side street. His blue eyes were faded from endless peering, his fingers twisted and calloused from stitching, his shoulders bent from stooping over the pressing table. The sparse brown hairs plastered against his sloping skull were slowly turning gray, and hence were almost invisible against the gray pallor of his skin.

Erik Conrad was not conscious of these changes. He noted and bewailed only the steady decline of his business. Conrad's window dummy slumped a trifle with the years, and Conrad himself stooped more than a bit—but the business itself tottered on its last legs. Time had dealt most harshly with little independent merchant tailors. The popularity of the readymade suit, the competition of stylish downtown tailoring establishments, the inroads made by modern cleaning and dyeing concerns—all had contributed to his loss of revenue.

Conrad saw it happen, and he found no solution. His only relief lay in cursing and grumbling as he went about his steadily decreasing daily tasks.

Then, a year ago, he had married.

Anna was a refugee; a young woman of great physical attraction and shy personal charm. A stranger in a new world, she readily consented to marriage, even though Erik Conrad was middle-aged and none too successful. She was grateful enough to stand in the steam-filled back room and assist in the pressing which now formed the bulk of Conrad's existing business.

CONRAD, for his part, gave up cursing and grumbling after his marriage to Anna. Now, when he was discouraged or out of sorts, he merely smiled and shrugged, took his wife by the throat, and throttled her. Not too hard, of course, for she had her work to do. Anna did not complain too greatly, nor did she give way to tears. It is difficult to either scold or cry when one's throat has been thoroughly choked by gnarled and twisted fingers.

At first she had longed for a child to keep her company, but after coming to know her husband better, she was glad that there was no little one to suffer Conrad's mistreatment. Sometimes, when the tailor was out delivering pressed garments, she grew lonely in the deserted shop, and it was then that she talked to herself, in German. Sometimes, when she became self-conscious or apprehensive about this habit, she pretended that the window-dummy was a person, and talked to it.

She even invented a name for it—"Otto", after her cousin, the one who had been killed in the air-raid over Dresden, so many years ago. Otto had worn a mustache, too, and they would have been married. But a bomb had fallen from the sky, and when they found Otto in the ruins his head had been cracked like the dummy's—so—and on his face was the little wooden smile, beneath the waxen pallor.

Anna told Otto all about it, and Otto listened, looking at her through the steam-clouds with his one good eye. Anna knew there was harm in this pretending, but she needed something.

And so life went on, its currents diverted from the tiny side-street where the little tailoring shop stood. The window dummy crouched corpse-like in the corner, Conrad choked his helpless, hopeless wife, and Anna's beauty faded and disappeared in wisps of hot steam. A fine cloud of gray dust descended to settle over bolts of cloth,

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racks of unclaimed garments, corners of the floor where no feet trod. The dust settled on the shoulders of the window dummy, sifted through Conrad's hair.

No connoisseur of horrors came to stare at the dummy or examine the sadistic secrets lurking behind the dingy exterior of the shop. Things might have gone on that way for years longer—the dummy could have continued to deteriorate, Conrad's fingers might have eventually left a permanent indentation in Anna's throat, and Anna would gradually have become a whining, half-mad harridan. The cloud of dust might have grown to an inch-deep layer upon the floor. The process could have been carried on indefinitely—but it didn't.

Mr. Smith saw to that.

Mr. Smith stepped into the tailoring shop one bright and sunny afternoon. Anna happened to be behind the counter in the outer room, and when she saw the stranger, one of her hands stole instinctively behind her head to tuck in the straggling hairs on her neck.

For Mr. Smith inspired that sort of self-concsiousness.

Mr. Smith looked prosperous. His sleek, smooth, well-shaven features wore a smile of benevolent affluence. His manicured nails and carefully clipped little gray Van Dyke beard hinted of riches, and his heavy tweed suit fairly shouted wealth to the beholder. The heavy, confident tread of his custom-made shoes was somehow transformed into the merry tinkle of jangling gold-pieces.

He placed one plump hand carefully on the dusty counter, so that the errant sunbeams played over the massive diamond ring upon his third finger, and drummed authoritatively.

"Is the proprietor in?" he asked.

Anna smiled. She looked at his face, looked at the ring, then looked at his face once more.

"I'll call him, sir."

Her step was strangely buoyant as she walked into the steam-filled back room. Conrad was dozing in a chair.

"Erik, there is a customer outside."

He blinked and grunted in annoyance.

"Quickly. He is a very distinguished gentleman, I think."

"Bill collector!" snarled Conrad. But he rose, brushed lint from his shabby coat, and shuffled out.

When he saw the stranger, he straightened up. He tried to look dapper and alert.

"Yes? What can I do for you, Mr—?"

"Smith. Mr. Smith," said the man in tweeds. "Do I understand correctly when I assume that you are prepared to custom-tailor a garment from material of my own selection?"

IT TOOK Erik Conrad several seconds to comprehend that this distinguished elderly gentleman was asking him if he could make a suit.

Then he understood, and immediately his mind conjured up visions of fabulous profits—ten dollars here, fifteen there, another twenty over-all on the basis of the fine fancy words this stranger had used.

"That is right, sir. You would like me to make you a suit? I imagine you'd want something special—"

"Correct. I want something very special."

Mr. Smith smiled with his eyes as well as his mouth when he answered the last question.

"Very well. If you'd give me an idea of what you have in mind, I could show you some very fine material. I've got a wonderful stock of woolens here."

Conrad gabbled on, wondering to himself how he could possibly dare to show any of his shabby bolts to such a rich and elegant customer. He tried to remember fragments of sales-talk long since fallen into disuse; he stalled for time, he perspired, he grew red and impassioned.

Mr. Smith interrupted with an airy wave of the hand. The diamond sparkled as it flashed through the air, and Conrad's faded eyes followed it thirstily, as if seeking to draw fresh fire from its ageless brilliance.

"That won't be necessary," said Mr. Smith. "I have the material already selected. Here, in my bag. Would you care to examine it?"

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"Of course," said Conrad. He was relieved and disappointed at the same time; relieved at being spared the ordeal of displaying his meagre stock, but disappointed because he could not profit on the sale of material.

Still, he could make enough on tailoring the garment itself. This was a piece of luck. He eagerly awaited an inspection as Mr. Smith opened the bag and spread a bolt of cloth on the counter. Conrad switched an overhead light into position.

"Take a look," said Mr. Smith. "There's enough here for a suit, I believe."

The cloth was gray. No, it couldn't be gray, because it had little flecks that reflected the light. It was gold. But gold does not shimmer in rainbow hues. It was a peculiar offshade of tan. But tan is not green, and there was green in this cloth, also some red and blue. No, it was gray. It had to be gray.

Conrad stared at it, stared at the iridescent surface. Mr. Smith seemed to notice nothing unusual, so Conrad forced himself to remain silent—but he had never looked upon this material before, in all his years of tailoring.

HE SPREAD the bolt out and fingered the material. It tingled to the touch, sliding through his hands with an electric crackling. It was not wool, or flannel, or cotton. The more Conrad saw of it, the less sure he became of what he saw. He could not discern a definite weave or texture. Neither eye nor finger could isolate a single thread for examination. Staring at it, Conrad began to experience a peculiar sensation—a tightness in his head.

But it was cloth, and Conrad was a tailor. He could make a suit from it, for this distinguished customer.

The distinguished customer eyed him closely as he examined the garment, and Conrad strove to remain impassive. "It will be difficult to work with so unusual a fabric," he commented. "Still, I can promise you a suit. Now, if you'll slip off your coat, sir, I will take the measurements—"

Mr. Smith held up his hand. The diamond's dazzling reflection gleamed from the single eye of the window dummy in the corner.

"The suit is not for me," he told Conrad.

"No? Then what is it that you wish?"

"The suit is for my son," the elderly man told him.

"Will he come in for a fitting, then?"

"No. It's to be a surprise. You see, I have all of his measurements written down here. Quite exact, they are. I shall require a most unusual fit for this garment."

"And the style?"

"That, too, is noted." Mr. Smith pulled out a sheaf of papers, covered with fine, crabbed script. "You understand all this must be done in strictest confidence, and exactly as I have indicated. I require a special suit. Of course, if you cannot handle it—"

Again the diamond described its glittering arc.

"I'm sure I can," said Conrad, hastily. "Anything you want, I'll give you."

"Money is no object." Mr. Smith smiled confidentially. "I expect you to bill me for your trouble. But these instructions, while they may seem peculiar to you, must be followed to the letter."

Conrad nodded, and the two men bent over the sheaf of papers. Mr. Smith read aloud, slowly, emphasizing certain matters and enlarging upon other details. The measurements must be thus and so. The cut must conform in this wise to the diagram. There must be no lining—none whatsoever—the technical problem involved here would have to be solved by Conrad's own ingenuity. Yes, and another thing; no vest would be required. Of course it might look a bit odd, but again Conrad must strive to turn out a suit of superficially conventional appearance and at the same time work within these limitations. Oh, and here was material for the buttons. Bone, to be turned and bored by hand.

Bye-the-bye, that was another very important stipulation. All work on this suit must be done by hand; no machine short-cuts were permissible. Of course Mr. Smith realized what this entailed, and he expected to pay for the extra attention.

Conrad listened, comprehended finally

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the physical rudiments of what he must do, if not the reasons inherent in the instructions. But then, understanding was not required of him—merely strict obedience.

"And here are the dates," Mr. Smith concluded. "The times during which you can work. As you see they are most carefully worked out; the hours and even the minutes calculated to a nicety. I beg of you to keep faith with me and sew on this suit only as directed. That is most important."

Here Conrad could not withhold his curiosity. "I can work only at these times?" he asked. "But why?"

Mr. Smith started to frown, then bit his lip until it curled back in a smile. "It is natural that you should ask, I know. All I can tell you is that I happen to be a believer in astrology. As such, I am sure you will humor me in these requests. Set your own price for the service."

Conrad shrugged. So be it. Perhaps this Mr. Smith was mad. But no, with his fine clothes and big diamond—he was only eccentric. The rich are often so.

"Please, not a word to anyone," the customer said, as he turned away from the counter. "Take a month, six weeks, but conform to my schedule and keep silent. I am reposing my trust in you."

"It shall be as you wish." Conrad bent his head in the immemorial obeisance of servant to master, of artisan to aristocrat, of craftsman to burgher, of artist to patron.

So master-aristocrat-burgher-patron Mr. Smith went away from the little shop and Conrad carefully wrapped and put away the strange bolt of cloth.

"Conrad, what is all this?" asked Anna, timidly slipping into the shop from the pressing room at the rear. "Who was that man?"

"Never mind, woman, it doesn't concern you," he told her.

"But I listened—I heard him talking to you about sewing at funny hours—"

"Be silent! It is nothing to you."

"Conrad, I'm afraid. There is something not right in all this, something that will make trouble."

"Trouble!" Conrad went over to her and gripped her thin shoulders. "It is you who makes trouble for me, you little fool!"

He beat her, then, until she whimpered and broke away to huddle in the corner of the shop. Conrad went out and sought the tavern where for a long time he sat mumbling to himself over his beer. In the beer-foam he saw the sparkling of diamonds.

Anna whispered to herself in the darkness, then whispered to Otto the dummy. In Otto's eye she saw not diamonds but the cold, empty glitter of glass.

II

THE spider began to spin.

Squatting in the gloom, the web was woven with crabbed cunning, with squinting skill. Silent and ceaselessly the weaving went, the pattern emerged from fashioning fingers. Days, hours, minutes threaded past on single strands.

There were interruptions and distractions, of course. Conrad did not proceed with his work without making a futile effort to analyze the nature of the peculiar fabric. He placed it under a strong light, even used a pocket magnifying glass in order to observe the threads—but all he could conclude was that this was some cloth foreign to his knowledge. He tried wetting the material and found that moisture left no stain. There was no real reason for his inquiry, of course; but Conrad was curious and the mystery surrounding the making of the suit disturbed him.

He was more violently disturbed, during these weeks, by the sudden appearance of collection agents and small creditors, including the tavern-keeper down the street. He fobbed them off with promises or curses as suited their temperaments, and told himself that he must hasten and complete the garment. Often as he sewed he amused himself by idle computation. Should he charge two hundred dollars for the suit? Or three hundred? Why not—five hundred?

One or twice he tried to hasten his task by working on the suit at times unspecified by Mr. Smith's schedule. Strangely enough, he could not sew—not literally, but his stitches went awry, the cloth slipped

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through his fingers with that peculiar crackling feel of static electricity, and there were other mishaps. Insensitive as he was, Conrad felt a touch of fear as he considered the nature of the unusual garment he was fashioning. The hints about astrology were a clue, but Conrad guessed at other things. This was a most peculiar job, and a most peculiar suit. It began to take shape under his fingers, and as it did so, fears took shape in Conrad's mind.

Whatever Mr. Smith intended, whatever his plans for the suit, Conrad meant to be out of the deal. All he wanted was to finish it and collect his—yes—five hundred dollars.

There were only two possible answers; either he was working for a crazy man or for a practitioner of Black Magic. Conrad relished neither speculation, and after long hours of toiling and brooding, it was small wonder that at times he lost his temper and raised his hand against Anna.

His wife received another, more thorough beating when at last the suit was completed. It hung from the hook, a strange, shimmering garment with high collar, unusual peaked lapels, a curious button arrangement, and no pockets whatsoever—sleeves of practically simian length, and curiously cuffless trousers. But it was the cloth more than the cut which contributed to the strangeness. In bolt form that fabric had disturbed Conrad's eyes. Now, in the shape of a suit, there was something quite odd and yet impelling to the eye. Conrad found himself glancing again and again at the new suit, trying to visualize it as it might appear when actually worn.

"Looks funny," Anna commented.

"Of course," Conrad nodded. "That's because it isn't pressed. So get busy, woman."

It was after this, when Anna returned and told him the suit just "wouldn't take a press," that Conrad gave his wife a severe beating. When he took the garment and attempted, in vain, to do the job himself, he was tempted to strike Anna again.

Instead, he reminded himself that it would be wise to deliver the suit and collect his payment as soon as possible.

Placing the peculiar coat and trousers in a box, Conrad set out for the address Mr. Smith had entrusted to him. It was in an unfamiliar section of the city, and he decided it would probably be best to go by taxi.

JOLTING through the streets in the cab, Conrad conjured up a vision of the mansion in which Mr. Smith must live. He would open a wrought iron gate, go up a long, tree-bordered walk to the big front door, grasp the bronze knocker and summon a butler. The butler would ask him to wait in the hall, then return to usher him into the big drawing room. And there was Mr. Smith—so—seated before the huge open fireplace. Ah, it was a wonderful house, that one!

The cab jerked to a halt and Conrad was jarred out of his musings. He started as he peered out at the doorway of the ramshackle tenement dwelling huddled between two warehouses on the mean street. For a moment he considered cursing the cab driver, then hastily checked the address. No mistake, this was his destination.

Conrad paid the driver and darted through the entrance, lugging the garment box under his arm. At the tenant register in the hall he pressed the buzzer for 4A. He paused, buzzed again, waited. Sighing, he prepared to trudge up the stairs.

It was not a pleasant ascent; leg-muscles protested, hands clung to rickety railings, nose inhaled the stairwell reek of a dozen compounded unpleasantness. Conrad cursed the eccentricity of his customer. Why should a wealthy man choose to affect such poverty? Unless, of course, he was hiding out here.

There was some mystery connected with this whole affair, and it might very well be that Mr. Smith had his reasons for choosing this squalid lodging.

Was that the answer?

Conrad considered the possibilities as he knocked on the door of 4A. He might be getting mixed up in some dirty business. Then again—

"Come in," said Mr. Smith. "I've been expecting you." The bright smile glittered,

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the diamond glittered, and Conrad's forebodings dissipated in the dazzle.

Yet there was nothing bright about the room. Toiling up the stairs, Conrad had wondered if perhaps his client might be concealing a luxurious hideaway beneath a grimy exterior. But this room was as filthy as the tenement in which it rotted.

Conrad noted a wooden table, a cot, a few chairs and a battered second-hand trunk in the corner beneath the single window overlooking the courtyard. A tattered curtain concealed a shallow alcove niche on the far side of the room. There was absolutely no sign of a fireplace, a butler, or any other figment of his day-dreams.

Mr. Smith, however, seemed real enough; and his eagerness at the sight of the box under Conrad's arm was quite genuine.

"You have brought it!" he boomed. "Splendid! I can hardly believe that you managed, with all the difficult stipulations I found it necessary to impose."

"It wasn't easy," Conrad replied. "Mighty strange, that material. And you wouldn't believe the trouble I had—"

"On the contrary, I would readily believe every word." Mr. Smith smiled and rubbed his hands, while the diamond zigzagged through the gloom. "I hadn't really dared to hope for success, and yet you say the suit is complete?"

"Just like you ordered."

"Fine. You have no idea how I've waited, what this means to me. And to my son."

"Your son—where is he?" Conrad inquired.

"That does not matter, does it?"

"But don't you want a fitting, to make sure everything's all right?"

"I'll take your word for it," said Mr. Smith. "If you followed instructions, the fit will be perfect. As a matter of fact, if you hadn't done exactly what I directed, you wouldn't have been able to complete the garment. So I know it's right."

"Thanks." Conrad bowed his head in acknowledgment. "I did my best to turn out a good job."

"I know you did, and it is I who should be thanking you." Mr. Smith also bobbed his head, at the same time extending both hands. "Now, if you'll be good enough to leave the suit with me—"

The diamond came close to the box, but Conrad drew back. "Wait a minute," he said. "What about money?"

"Ah, yes, the fee. How much did you say it was?"

Erik Conrad took a deep breath of musty air. "Five hundred dollars," he murmured.

"Very reasonable," commented his customer. "Send the bill along and I'll take care of it."

"But—"

"Yes?"

"I have the bill made out, right here." Conrad fumbled in his pocket. "And if you don't mind, I need the money badly, and I was hoping that maybe today—"

Mr. Smith shook his head, slowly but emphatically. "I'm afraid that's out of the question. After all, it's not customary for one to pay tradesmen on delivery, is it? Why not mail your bill in the regular fashion—you'll get your money, never fear."

Again he sought to take the package from Conrad, but the tailor retreated to the curtained alcove. "I must have my money first," he persisted. "Look, if this was a regular job I wouldn't mind, but I've spent all these weeks working. And I have bills to pay. You wouldn't understand, because you're rich, but it's different with me. I got to eat."

"My dear fellow." Mr. Smith advanced, cordially confidential. "On the contrary, I can understand your situation only too well. For it so happens that at the moment, I am in the same fix."

"You?"

"Precisely." Mr. Smith grinned as if he had just told the biggest joke in the world. "Oh, don't misunderstand. In a very short while I should be in funds again. As soon as my son and I are re-united, in fact. But until then, I'm far from rich. In fact, I have no money, no money at all. So you'll have to wait—"

"But how can you say that?" Conrad wailed. "A man like you, wearing a big diamond?"

Mr. Smith drew the ring from his finger and tossed it on the table. It glinted its way over the wood, then rolled to the floor.

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Mr. Smith did not bother to pick it up. "A fake," he said. "A cheap, synthetic fake. Oh, at one time I had another, and the stone was real enough. But I was forced to place it in pawn, along with almost everything I possessed, in order to continue my studies. I have spent every penny on my son. Now, please, be reasonable and give me that suit."

Again he reached for the package and again Conrad retreated—this time backing through the curtain veiling the alcove until his progress was halted by a waist-high obstruction.

Conrad turned and found himself confronting a gleaming refrigerator—a big one, and obviously brand new.

"What's this?" the tailor accused. "If you're so hard up for money, why do you need a big new refrigerator?"

"It's not for me," Mr. Smith placated, hastily. "I had to buy it for my son. Like the suit. Now if you'll come over here and show me—" and he attempted to grasp Conrad by the arm and draw him away.

But Conrad shrugged him off, still staring at the gleaming refrigerator with a look of mingled puzzlement and disdain.

"Poor!" he muttered. "Why, I'll bet it's full of fancy food and—"

Impulsively, the little tailor yanked at the handle. The door opened and he stared inside. An icy blast fanned his face.

There were no shelves in the refrigerator. The six-foot high interior consisted of bare walls framing a single object. That object was the rigid, frozen body of a man.

The corpse stood upright, a blue and naked horror with a youthful face congealed into the age-old grimace of death.

"Close that door!" screamed Mr. Smith.

Conrad released the handle and jumped away. He pressed his back against the wall and bared his teeth. "Murderer!" he gasped. "So that's it!"

"No, you don't understand. I'm no murderer. He died a natural death. Can't you see? He is my son. He is the one I was working for, planning for. That's why I had you make the suit. It's for him. You can't stop me now, no one can stop me."

Mr. Smith advanced. His hands worked at his sides, then rose. "Give me the suit," he said. "Give it to me."

Conrad tried to move away, but Mr. Smith blocked his path. "Give it to me," he repeated. And his hands moved out.

IT HAD grown dark in the murky little room. Erik Conrad saw a diamond eye wink up through the shadows on the floor. It was watching him—watching him as he stood there with a dead man behind him and a madman before him. The dead man had grimaced, and now the madman was grimacing, too. Grimacing, and reaching for Erik Conrad in the dark, as the diamond eye stared.

There was nothing else. There was no five hundred dollars. There was no butler. There was no justice or mercy or hope. Only this maniac trapping him in the blackness and now he was hitting him across the side of the face, and from far away a panting voice said over and over again, "Give it to me, you fool, give it to me, you fool, give it to me, you fool—"

Until Erik Conrad struck back. The pudgy madman tried to choke him, tried to kick him, tried to squeeze him, and there was nothing else to do but strike back. Conrad said, "Let me go," but Mr. Smith didn't even hear him because he began to scream and claw at Conrad's eyes. There was nothing else to do but strike back and it was only natural that Conrad pick up the wooden chair and swing it. He felt it land on Mr. Smith's head and Mr. Smith's scream died to a moan. Conrad raised the chair again and brought it down. Mr. Smith's moan died to a gurgle. Conrad struck again, and again, and again, feeling the chair splinter and come apart in his hands. Mr. Smith's gurgle died.

And so did Mr. Smith.

Erik Conrad didn't know that until afterwards, of course. Not until he shook off his hysteria and turned on the light and bent down, panting, to examine Mr. Smith's crushed and battered features as he lay sprawled on the grimy floor. Then the tailor understood.

He was a murderer.

The diamond eye had seen it all. The

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diamond eye knew it was a mistake, an accident. The diamond eye knew that Mr. Smith was a madman who preserved his son's body in a refrigerator and had ordered a suit made up out of his own insane impulses. The diamond eye understood what had happened.

But the diamond eye was a fake. And the murder was real. Soon the police would come—

Erik Conrad rose, grabbed at the suit package, and headed for the door. He had to get out of here. Everything was ruined now, everything was spoiled, there was no money, and he had risked his life forever in coming here. It was—

At the door, Conrad halted. He noted once again the presence of the battered trunk in the corner. A wild hope rose, and Conrad knelt.

The trunk was unlocked and opened easily. Conrad threw back the lid. This was the treasure-chest, the secret hiding-place, the source of riches; it had to be, it was only logical and right and just. Eagerly he surveyed the contents of the old trunk.

"Books!" Conrad groaned. "Nothing but books!"

But wait—some of them were quite old. Some of them had iron hasps and locks. Some of them had worn vellum inserts. Didn't people collect old books? Conrad seemed to remember reading about auctions and sales at one time—there were people who foolishly paid a lot of money for things like that.

He stacked an armful hastily and stood up. After all, it wasn't really stealing. Mr. Smith owed him five hundred dollars which he would never collect. Surely Conrad was entitled to a few wormy old books. These volumes were no longer of any use to Mr. Smith. Dead men read no tales.

Conrad stepped into the hall, carrying the suit box and the books. The hall was dark and still as he tiptoed downstairs. No one had seen him come in, no one saw him leave. The taxi-driver wouldn't remember him, would never connect Conrad with the killing in the ordinary course of events.

The ordinary course of events—

In that phrase Conrad recognized the key to salvation. He must only remember to behave naturally as if nothing had happened, to return to the shop and go about his business in the normal way, and there would be no trouble at all.

Conrad walked down the street, a little tailor carrying his bundles. He paused at corners, jostled and was jostled in return, obeyed traffic signals like the good citizen he was, and eventually arrived at his shop. Strangely enough, he was trembling.

The place was dark and nobody saw him enter. Nobody except Otto, the window-dummy. And Otto's eye, like Mr. Smith's diamond, was glass.

Conrad smiled as he shuffled down the hall into the bedroom. Glass. It was all glass, everything was a fake. And if everything was a fake, then nothing had happened. He hadn't killed anyone.

"It's a fake, just a fake," Conrad murmured to himself as he fell face downward on the bed. "Nothing to worry about—it was all a fake!" Then he began to cry.

III

CONRAD wasn't conscious of the exact moment of transition from tears to terror. Sometime he must have roused himself and switched on the bedroom light. Somehow he must have begun to paw idly through the stack of battered books. Somewhere he must have noticed the volume printed in heavy black-letter German, and he had begun to read the text.

It was then that he remembered his early speculations concerning Mr. Smith; the possibilities of the mysterious stranger's interest in Black Magic. Mr. Smith had proven himself a madman, to be sure, but still, these volumes were books on sorcery. The treatise Conrad was reading dealt with spells and charms, with formulae and incantations designed to raise up demons. Erik Conrad found himself stumbling over the pronunciation of strange names—Azaziel, Samael, Yaddith. There was nothing particularly disconcerting about the way in which the book was written; everything was set down in a straightforward, matter-

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of-fact style. Only the subject-matter itself was grotesque and irrational.

Perhaps it was this very circumstance which caused Conrad's hands to tremble as he held the tome. This treatise on the summoning of evil entities was written in the style of a cookbook, filled with recipes. *Take the maiden's blood, take the heart torn from the infant's breast, take the eyes of the hanged man—mix and stir in the cauldron, add the corpse-fat, and evoke your friend.* Simple. Easy. Anyone can do it.

It was absurd, it was insane, it was—convincing. Men had written this book, men had read this book, men had used this book for centuries. Men like Mr. Smith, whatever his real name might be. They had used this book to produce—*what?*

It was then that Erik Conrad began to tremble. And it was then that Anna returned from her evening shopping; returned quietly and tiptoed into the room so as not to disturb Conrad as he read.

"Erik—" she murmured.

The tailor's face contorted with startled fear. He rose from the bed with a gasp which, as he faced and recognized the intruder, became transformed into a snarl of rage.

"What do you mean by sneaking in like that?" he choked. "You stupid fool!"

"But what is wrong? I only wanted to ask about the suit. You sold it, eh?"

Conrad indicated the box on the bed. "Does this look like I sold it?" he demanded.

"Was something wrong, then?"

"No, nothing was wrong. Don't bother me, woman!"

"But the money—I thought—"

"Be quiet!" Conrad glowered at her, but Anna persisted.

"After you left" she continued, "I told Mister Schwenk the butcher—he come after the money for the meat, you know—that he should come back tomorrow because you were getting paid by a customer. So—"

"You told him!" The tailor gripped Anna by the shoulder. "But I warned you to say nothing to anyone. Nobody should know about the suit, understand? Do not mention it to a soul, do not mention it to me again, ever. And get it out of my sight, quick."

Anna sank, gasping with incomprehension, in this torrent of violence. But Conrad's clawlike fingers bore her up. "Not a word!" he screamed. "Now take the suit and burn it, woman! Burn it in the furnace. And never speak of it again. Forget everything. Forget that I made it, forget Mr. Smith, forget that I went out today!"

He raised the box from the bed and thrust it into Anna's arms. Then he slapped her across the face once, twice, three times. The third time he brought his hand away wet with tears. A fourth blow would bring blood, and for a moment he was tempted to deliver it.

Then suddenly all purpose left him. "Get out!" he screamed. "Get out and leave me alone."

Anna stumbled out and closed the door. Conrad slumped to the bed once more and returned to his reading. He read for a long time. There were many subjects of outré interest.

Evocations—the runes of pestilence—the resurrection of vanished youth—the cloak of invisibility—the raising of the dead—the preservation of corpses and the use of mantic arts in restoring a semblance of life—the weaving of the cloth of Fate—

Conrad read the last sections again. It was all explained in prosaic detail. The bargain with the Powers. The sacrifice. The granting of the boon, the woven strands of Immortality with which to cloak the preserved corpse. The finished garment to impart life to any wearer bearing human guise. Conrad read it, and Mr. Smith had read it, too. He had read it and acted on it.

NOW at last, Erik Conrad knew the secret of the suit, the secret of the frozen corpse, the secret of the weaving and the shaping. Mr. Smith had hoped to bring life back to his son.

Of course the old man had been mad, just as the author of this book had been mad. Best now to burn the book, and the other volumes, in case there should ever be any tracing, any questions.

Conrad loaded his arms with the ancient

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tomes and plodded down the dark hall to the basement stairs. He descended, knelt before the furnace, opened the door, recoiled momentarily before the blast of heat; then tossed the books into the fire.

There was no trace, no single shred left of the strange suit. Apparently there had been no burning cloth odor, either. Anna had done her job well.

Anna—where was Anna? Conrad climbed the stairs, peered into the kitchen. Deserted. And the hall was dark. Was she out in the shop? She must be, but why?

Quietly, Erik Conrad walked down the hall. Yes, she was in the shop, he could hear her whispering. Talking to herself. He could distinguish words, phrases.

". . . hates me, Otto. You're the . . . friend I've got . . . going crazy . . . you had lived. Wish . . . could talk . . . tonight . . . hit me. Sometimes . . . dead."

She was in there, talking to that window-dummy again! Was the whole world going mad?

He moved quickly into the shop, switching on the light. Anna turned. She was huddled in a heap at the feet of the wax dummy. Conrad stared at her, then at the mannikin. There was something strange about it, something different. It took a moment for him to comprehend and then he realized that Anna had put the crazy suit on the dummy.

"What are you doing?" Conrad was surprised when his voice came out so quietly. "Didn't I tell you to burn the suit?" Why he was talking calmly, sensibly.

"I was going to. I didn't mean any harm. I just wanted to look at it again—you acted so funny about it all that I wondered if there was a secret."

Conrad nodded, still very quietly. He even helped Anna to her feet as she continued.

"So I thought I could see it better if I put it on Otto—I mean, on the dummy here. Did you notice it in the dark, Erik? It looks queer—so glowing—"

Conrad was gentle with her, quite gentle. "Anna," he said, "this is not wise of you. To disobey my orders. To pry into things that do not concern you. To talk to clothing dummies. Are you sure you feel all right, Anna?"

She hid her face. "I know," she sighed. "Sometimes I wonder if I'm out of my mind. But you are cruel, Erik. You beat me."

"I will not beat you now," said Conrad. "If you will burn the suit at once. I only hit you because I was afraid. Perhaps if I tell you, you can understand." It was odd how calm he felt, how quietly he could talk like this to her now.

"You see, the suit must be burned. And no one must ever hear about it, or about Mr. Smith. Because this afternoon we quarreled, and I killed him."

"You killed—?"

"An accident. Yes, an accident. He tried to take the suit away, it was self-defense, Anna. Mr. Smith was crazy. He had his son's body in a refrigerator and he thought the suit would bring the boy back to life."

Anna stared into his eyes. Conrad nodded gravely. "So you see, it just happened that way. But the police wouldn't believe me if they knew. That's why I wanted the suit burned. That's why I wanted you to forget. Now. Do you understand me?"

"Yes." Anna came close. "And I'm sorry, I didn't know what was upsetting you, Erik. Only—"

"Only?"

"Only I think you should tell the police. Tell them the truth, tell them everything. I'll make them believe you. Please, Erik! You cannot carry such a sin on your soul forever. For my sake, Erik, tell them what happened, that it was self-defense. I—I couldn't bear to go on living with a murderer."

As she spoke, Conrad stared over her shoulder at the clothing dummy. It slumped ridiculously in the corner, its cracked waxen features stolid, its glass eye gleaming. The impossible suit hung in ill-fitting folds across its shoulders, giving an apelike aspect to the arms. All this Erik saw, and at the same time he was conscious of listening to Anna. Ovbiously she was losing her sanity. Obviously she would never cease to urge him to confess and might even end up by going to the police herself with the story.

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SO, OBVIOUSLY he must remain calm. Remain calm now as he moved back to the wall and switched off the light. There. Now the shop was pitch dark. No one could see in from the street. No one could see as he did the obvious thing—take Anna by the throat and squeeze, so, and squeeze and squeeze—

"Help!" The gasp came out, and he had to squeeze harder, not so calmly. "Erik—stop—oh—save me—Otto—save me!"

Crazy, to call on the dummy for help. Erik squeezed until she sagged and he could stare over her shoulders, stare into the pitch dark, which wasn't really pitch dark at all because something was glowing over there in the corner. Something with arms and legs. It was the suit, of course, Anna had said the suit glowed in the dark, and it did. Like phosphorus, like silver, like gold, glowing brighter and brighter, and every time that Erik squeezed the glow increased.

It was only the crazy suit, the crazy suit ordered by the crazy man for a crazy purpose; there was nothing to fear. Erik Conrad could bring death to Anna, but the suit could not bring life. It couldn't!

But Conrad wasn't calm any more. Not when he saw the silver arms stretch, saw the silver legs race forward, saw the leering eye of glass gleaming and flashing with a light that pierced brain and being.

He let Anna go, and turned to flee. Something caught him in the dark, then. There was nothing left to do but scream, and he tried that, but too late. There was a gleaming and a pressure and a spangle of silver fire that burst into final blackness.

Then there was nothing.

Only a connoisseur of horrors would have appreciated Erik Conrad's window-dummy as it loomed over him, clad in the silver suit of enchanted Life—with its waxen fingers clamped in a grip of death about Erik Conrad's throat.

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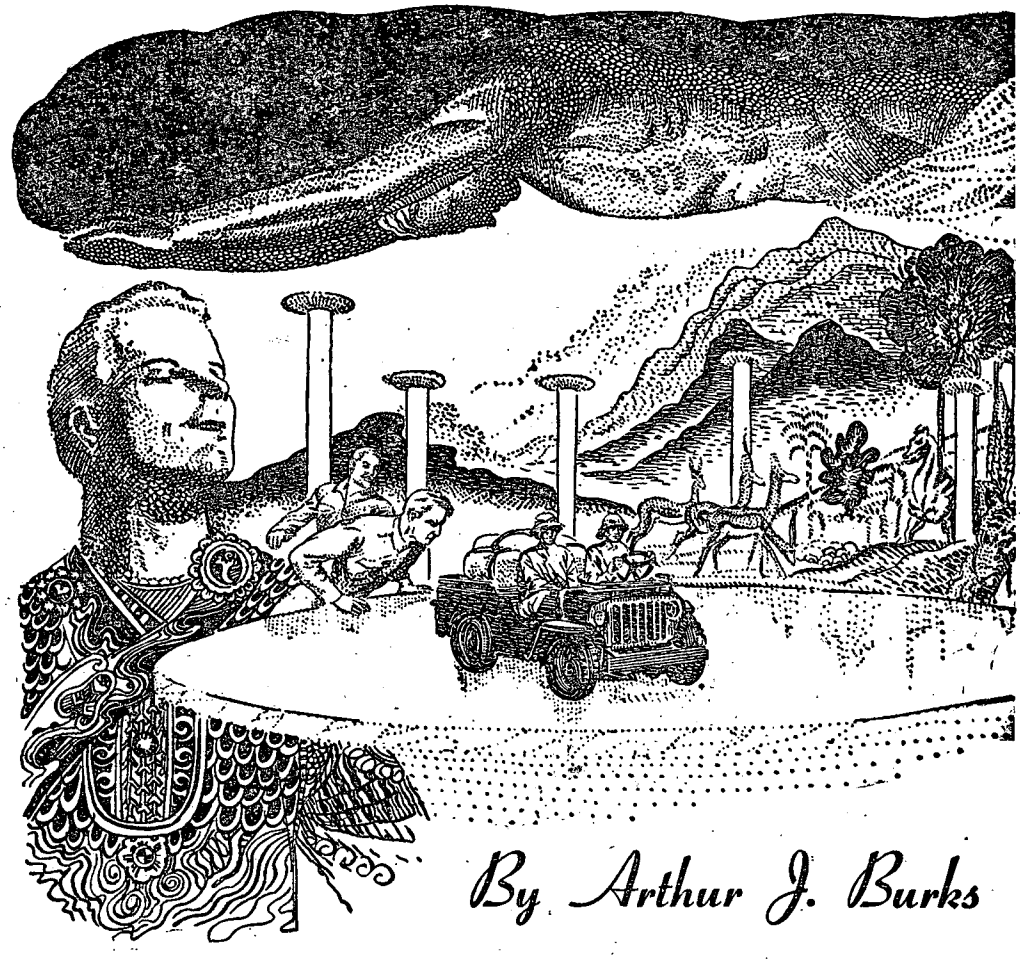
Shallajai



By Arthur J. Burks

CHAPTER I

ROSE QUARTZ PRISONERS

TAKE it from an old Orientalist, there is no such thing as chance, accident, or a miracle. It wasn't luck or accident that made those wild Gobi goats lead Gol Rank, Doctor Gol Rank, and me into the Garden of Eden. My name is Sherm Carnes. I'm a doctor, too, of Natural Sciences, with enough experiences around the world during the past thirty years, half of them in Asia, not to take anything for granted.

Gol Rank and I were driving our jeep leisurely here and there on the Gobi, never too far from the Wells of Shallajai, taking care not to get ourselves involved in the drifting red sands which here have eroded the very centuries, when a herd of goats jumped into view from nowhere.

I knew that other explorers and archeologists sometimes amused themselves by chasing the goats and even the Shallajai dog-bears, in cars or on horseback, but I had never gone in for it myself. I was looking for something else, something you'd never guess. Do you know your Bible? Well, you don't have to know much of it

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to remember how Moses wandered for forty years in the wilderness because of the "stiff-neckedness" of his people. The world takes it for granted that the wilderness referred to was somewhere near what is now known as the Holy Land. I believed the story, but not the place. I had been sure for years that the "wilderness" of Moses and his brethren was in or on the border of Gobi Desert. I raised the men and money and went hunting for proof. I figured that the "forty years" were more like centuries or even millenniums, and I began finding proof. . . .

Then came the brief respite that proved to be no respite at all; Gol Rank and I chased goats.

"Don't you ever get tired of tinned meat?" said Rank, when we ran into the goats.

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"Meaning, I take it," I said, "you think we might run down one of those critters?"

"Something like that." Gol Rank is thirty-five to my fifty-five and sometimes he gets too big for his breeches. Sometimes he fails in proper respect to age and wisdom; that's why I liked him, I guess. Sandy-haired, freckled, pale blue eyes, Gol Rank certainly didn't look like a picture book hero or adventurer. He looked just what he was: my assistant excavator and putter-together.

I gave chase to the goats. If they had been smart the goats would have taken to the first sand dune and I'd have been stuck. But they ran on the best ground, exactly as if they were daring us to run into them. I began to have visions of cracking one on the rump, even with a rickety jeep, breaking its leg, and having to kill it to ease its suffering—after which Gol Rank and I, and whatever other of our Chinese and Mongols we invited would eat of it. I trusted it would not be too tough, but no matter how tough it was, it would be better then tinned stuff.

"Step on it, Sherm!" yelled Rank. "You've got the brutes right in your hands! They're going straight into a pocket!"

It looked like it, too. Suddenly the two dunes between which the goats were leading us began to narrow down. It looked to me as if they ran together far ahead of the speeding goats. The goats, too, began to behave as if they sensed some sort of trap, and I expected them, any second, to try to break back past us, or take to the dunes and lose us. Then it became clear they had missed their chance, for suddenly there was rock, or glistening crystal, in place of the sand. If the stuff wasn't quartz, rose quartz besides, then I had never seen rose quartz. In a matter of seconds we saw enough rose quartz. . . .

"Keep your mind on the goats!" said Gol Rank. "The rose quartz won't run away! It's been here longer than the goats!"

The goats were pretty crazy by now. If we had had rifles it would have been easy to do them in, at least one of them. Gol Rank wasn't such a much as a marksman, and he couldn't drive a jeep any better than he could shoot, so I had to drive.

The goats had been playing, up to now, but something in this narrowing defile of quartz scared the daylights out of them. They really got down to the business of running. They left the jeep behind as if it were standing still. But since there didn't seem to be any way out we continued to follow them. They vanished ahead of us.

"The way turns," said Gol Rank. He took off his helmet and let what breeze there was blow through his sparse hair. Then he took off my helmet to give my hair—a lot sparser—a touch of the breeze of our own passing. We slowed down when it looked as if we'd hit one side or the other of our strange highway, and wondered what had happened to the goats. We came to a turn. We came to the end of a *cul de sac*. We saw no goats. They had vanished. They could not have jumped or climbed out of the way. They must have flown out. They had no wings. They were *gone*! Not only that, but we turned left into the end of the way, with that rose quartz all the way around us except in our rear. The sun upon the stuff was blinding. The sun over Gobi is a tough proposition at any time. Driving along this strange way hadn't helped my myopia a bit, nor did it help when I stopped the jeep in a dead end so close and narrow I couldn't even turn my front wheels, and felt the full force of the sun as well as the full blaze of its reflection on the quartz. Now the quartz walls were fully thirty feet above us, in all directions except to the rear. Gol Rank and I looked at each other. Sweat stood out on him in big beads. It was hotter in here than in Hades itself.

"Let's get out of here!" said Rank. I had stalled the jeep. I jammed the starter. The motor refused to respond. Rank shook my arm. "I don't like this," he said. "Let's get going! I don't want to disappear like those goats!"

"Well, do you think *I* do?" I asked. "We're stalled. I filled the gas tank. The motor is in good shape. There is no reason why she won't go—except that she won't."

I kept on talking, wanting Gol Rank to talk when I stopped. I'm not easily impressed by anything, and I don't go off the deep end very often. You don't, if you're

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at home in the Orient and in sites of ancient ruins. If you did you'd have ducked out long ago. But this thing that had happened to Rank and me was too much like. . . .

"We can pull her out, turn her, and push it back out," I said. "For myself I've enough of this place already!"

Rank tried to get out on his side of the jeep. His feet came in contact with the rose quartz. I hadn't realized it was so close. I tried my side. Same thing. Well, there were other ways. I set the gears in neutral, stepped onto the broad hood, pushed against the rock directly ahead. Nothing happened. I stepped back to the rear of the jeep, intending to step out and *pull.* But when I got back there it was clear it wouldn't work.

There wasn't room to step out behind the jeep! The rose quartz was snugged up against the rear seat! Yes, I remember what I said. We turned into this place from a wider way because we thought the goats came this way.

"Well, Gol," I said, "it looks as if we're trapped. One thing is left. There's no roof to this trap. I can stand on your shoulders, or you can stand on mine. . . ."

"And reach the rest of the thirty feet!" said Rank. "Haven't you noticed that the walls are getting higher . . . and higher . . . and higher?"

I hadn't, but now I did. The walls were getting higher for just one reason. We were lowering away to somewhere; where that was only the bibulous gods who look after scientists knew, and when that thought came to me I couldn't possibly have realized how close it was to the truth. A scientist has little time or mental room for mythology, whether it be the Buddhist, Taoist or Jesus myths. Naturally a scientist studies such stuff, because he wants to know everything about everything.

In our modern-day jeep, Gol Rank and I, two latest of the world's curious in the world of science, were being lowered by some mysterious elevator, into depths we knew nothing of, somewhere in the Gobi, not too far from the wells of Shallajai.

"What do you suppose was in the water we drank from Shallajai?" said Rank.

"Hashish!" I snorted. "Obviously! Or raw opium!"

"Anyway," he said calmly, "we both saw the rose quartz—or *did* you?"

"I did," I replied. "I still do. We're taking a ride on some kind of elevator of the stuff."

"In a place where no elevator could possibly be," said Rank. "In a spot where Gobi goats become invisible or take wings around the nearest corner!"

Strangely, though we both estimated we were fifty or a hundred feet below ground level when we stopped, there was no darkness. There was a rosy glow in the air. There was no breeze, yet I for myself felt as soothed and relaxed as if there *were* a breeze, a cool one, moreover, like none we ever experienced in the Gobi. We sat in the jeep when it stopped, looking at each other. Then the quartz directly before the jeep moved away from us, circled to the right, proved to be a door, and the jeep, still in neutral, slid down a gentle incline onto golden sand. The door of quartz closed, apparently of itself, without the slightest sound.

I stared at Gol Rank. He stared at me. We were, at first sight, inside a greenhouse. It looked, in those first few seconds, to be of vast proportions. There were innumerable trees, lushly green, glistening golden, royal purple, Chinese red. . . .

There were plants, shrubs, grasses. Now, I know my trees, my plants, shrubs and grasses. But I didn't know a single solitary one of those I saw around me. I looked at Gol Rank. He shrugged, spread his palms wide, didn't say anything whatever. He knew even less than I, which was no news to me, at that.

We looked around us. I couldn't even see where we came in. Our jeep tires made no impression on the ground inside the "greenhouse."

"Blow the horn!" said Rank. "There must be somebody in charge of this joint."

I was so afraid, on the instant, to blow that horn, that I knew I had to blow it if only for my own self-esteem's sake. I blew it. Weird echoes went rolling through the trees, through the strangest jungle man had

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ever seen—had ever seen, that is, within recorded history time. Almost at once a whistle sounded in answer. It was such a whistle as I had never heard before. I looked at Rank again. This time he just raised one shoulder, and his face was a little pale. There was something unnerving about that whistle.

We waited. Around one of the trees, so suddenly he almost made us jump, came a *man*.

He was well above six feet tall, six feet six or so, I thought, with hair the color of the sun, eyes the deepest blue I've ever seen, a build that would have made Apollo Belvedere retreat into the Labyrinth. He wore garments out of this world. The nearest thing to them anybody is likely to know are the imperial robes of His Majesty Hsien Feng, the great Manchu ruler of China in the 1850's, and these only to people who have visited the inner museum in Peking's Forbidden City. They were gowns copied from the gold of the sun, the blue of the sea and sky, the white of scrubbed clouds. His shoes had the curled-up toes of Chinese, Tibetan and Mongol royalty. I stared at his hands, expecting to see those long hideous fingernail protectors which Chinese elite used to wear to prove they never worked, and required their feminine favorites to wear. This man had normal fingernails. He smiled at me.

"A proper gardener," he said calmly in English, "can't be so careful of his hands. Welcome to Shallajai, Doctors Goldrick Rank and Sherman Carnes! You have been expected, of course, for much longer than you have any idea!"

"Well," I said, trying to appear dignified as I stepped out of the jeep and went around to stand beside Rank who had also stepped to the ground, "at least you speak English, as well as we do, I should guess."

"Better," said the blue-eyed one calmly, "but that is to be expected. After all, I know it from its beginnings. I know, also, exactly how it will be spoken a hundred years from now. Naturally, that gives me an advantage."

"A nut, sure as shooting!" said Gol Rank. "We've just got sunstroke, Sherm. We'll snap out of it when the sun goes down; then we'll return to our base camp."

The man chuckled, then laughed aloud, throwing his head back the better to enjoy it.

"A nut if you like, until you know better," said the other. "Your jeep will be all right where it is until you need it again. Would you care to come with me?"

I hesitated, looking back at the place where we had come through the rose quartz door.

"Look, my friend," I said, "you have the advantage of us. This also smacks somewhat of duress. At least let us know your name and what you are."

"Oh, I do apologize," he said. "My name is Tammuz!"

"*Tammuz*!" I said. "Not a Chinese name, a Mongol or Tibetan name, but Babylonian! Tammuz, Gol, in case you don't know or remember, was the Babylonian god who supposedly presided over the Babylonian counterpart of the Garden of Eden! And you, my friend, are named *for* Tammuz?"

"No," he said, chuckling. "I am not named *for* Tammuz. I am *the* Tammuz, Tammuz in the flesh!" He raised his hand just as he turned. "But don't allow surface misconceptions to interfere with your first impressions. I am Tammuz, as I've just told you. Also, I am just as human as you are. So were, and are, the great figures of what *you* call mythology. But it's very simple, really, here where all time is *Now* and we have eternal use of the Sea of Glass!"

CHAPTER II

THE SEA OF GLASS

NEITHER of us had ever seen anything like it. I had been in the Belgian Congo, the Amazon Valley, Ceylon, the Philippine Islands; I had never seen such jungles. I knew Gol Rank had not. There were no such jungles, not anywhere—except here; here in the heart of the Gobi, within hearing of the whispering wells of Shallajai.

How can you make a reader or a listener believe something you don't believe your-

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self, even when you know you've gone through it? Even when the proof is overwhelming, if ever proof to human ears, eyes, nose and fingers is overwhelming? How can human senses prove *any*thing, accept anything as proof?

There was rose quartz in the Gobi. There was everything there. It had been the site of many long-vanished civilizations, cities to marvel at; civilizations and cities of which there remained not one single provable trace in human archives anywhere—known to man, that is. There were records in the rocks, Gol Rank and I had found many, were finding more. When our reports, carefully documented, proved as far as men can prove anything to other men, were given to the world, the world might well be amazed.

What started me? Chinese legendary history, said to date back a million and a quarter years. Then, or thenabouts, there had been the first man, P'an Ku. P'an Ku, according to legend, still lived; but he had got fed up with the world and gone to live on the moon. . . . Science has often had to start with less. Now, about this *Tammuz*, even if he was *the* Tammuz of Babylonia, while a mere sprout compared to P'an Ku, he would still be some thousands of years older than the proverbial three score and ten. Even Hilton's Shangri-la called it quits at something under three hundred years of age, and the oldest Chinese of recent record was still under three hundred—old enough in all conscience.

We walked through the jungles, all the way between the trees, among the brush, being perfect with a perfection impossible to describe to anybody who didn't see it. Planned horticulture, even that of the green-fingered Japanese, had nothing like it . . .

"Of course not," said Tammuz, leading the way, "*this* was done by the First Experts!"

"Mind reader?" I asked.

"Of course," said Tammuz. "Mind reading is simple, after all. Anybody can do it who takes care to command his own reactions. We could travel faster, but it is better you see everything."

There were animals among the trees. I recognized many of them. One, a Siberian tigress, ten good solid feet of cat, full grown, with long dugs that indicated kittens somewhere, rose from a bed of grass as we almost ran over her, pricked up her ears at Gol Rank and me. My heart jumped into my throat. Tammuz scarcely noted the savage, dangerous feline. The tigress came to me, then, mouth open, eyes utterly friendly, rubbed a huge head against my side, almost knocking me over!

"She isn't a lion, and you're sure no lamb," said Gol Rank, "but if the two of you should lie down together I wouldn't be surprised! What kind of a dump *are* we in, anyway?"

"What kind of a . . . a *dump*, as you call it," said Tammuz, "would you expect Tammuz to operate?"

There was a chuckle in his voice, as if he were enjoying himself. I pinched Gol Rank; he did the same for me. His fingers were like pliers. He twisted them, and *hurt*. Tammuz chuckled again.

"What's so unbelievable about terrific longevity?" queried Tammuz. "Can you, a scientist, think of one good reason why people should die at *any* age—unless by personal choice? Mankind, as even scientists know, has free will, the right of choice; man has the same right with his own life as he has for everything else. Just because he has ceased making use of it, allows himself to grow old . . ."

THERE were more animals. Great cats, a number of them. They didn't even bother to get out of our way. And there were older things, like eohyppus, the ancestor of the horse; like the various *canis* forbears of the dog, the pre-mammothian elephant . . . and they were real, for all of them were obviously pets, or friends of man, for they came and rubbed against us, every last one of them. Not one ran away from us, showed the slightest fear.

"The greatest indictment of man," said Tammuz, "is that animals, birds, snakes, fear him! He even fears his own kind: Often he fears himself! Tragic! That's why you're here! Ah, here is the Sea of Glass.

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We can look further later, or we can 'travel' via the Sea of Glass."

It wasn't much, not at first; didn't seem to be. Looked like a greenish pond, bulging upward toward the center like, maybe, the lens of a telescope. It was a hundred feet across, about. There was a railing around it, of rose quartz too. It was just higher than our waists. We could put our elbows on it, look down into the sea. It was like looking into a flea circus. Later I was to feel sure that was the best kind of comparison. Tammuz did something, punched a button, I think.

We three stood side by side, Tammuz in the center, Gol Rank on his right, myself on his left. A circle of light appeared on the Sea of Glass directly under us. No mistaking what it was: a section of the Gobi Desert which included both our camp, with our Chinese busily engaged, and our Mongols, and the Shallajai Wells, so deep, slender, whispering and mysterious.

"Video, Tammuz," I said, "is old stuff."

Tammuz chuckled. I was beginning to like this harmless nut.

"It is indeed!" he said. "Some millions of years older even than you think! Pay attention, now . . ."

Gol Rank and I stared. We saw ourselves leaving camp in our jeep. We saw ourselves driving to the Shallajai Wells. We saw ourselves returning, jumping the goats, chasing them into the area of sand dunes. We followed every move, without breathing almost. It was all just as it happened.

"Has to be movies of some sort," I said. "Though where your cameraman was I've no idea."

"It is not a picture," said Tammuz. "This is *you*, Doctors Rank and Carnes, coming to pay me a visit!"

"Impossible!" I snapped. "How, even if you could play tricks with time, could we be both there, chasing goats and, I admit it now, looking a trifle silly, and here with you, watching?"

"Because," he said calmly, "during a given lifetime you are everywhere in your allotted span of it; rather, in that section of it which your wilfulness has caused you to allot yourself!"

I let some breath out. "I'd like to know how you could possibly prove such a thing," I said.

"Simple," said Tammuz, "speak to yourselves, there! They can hear you easily. As a matter of fact they can *see* you, too!"

I raised my hand, hailed myself in the Sea of Glass. "Hi, George!" I called. The figure in the car answered. "Hi, Counterpart!" And I snapped at Tammuz. "That does it. This can't be us, in a past time, for there was no such hail while we chased those goats!"

"*When that day comes*," said Tammuz softly, "*time shall be no longer*!"

"Tammuz the Babylonian," I said, "would scarcely be quoting from the Apocalypse!"

"Why not?" he asked, "I am a worker in it, one of its manipulators! That's how I happen to have special authority to explain to you a *little* of the working of the Sea of Glass!"

The Sea of Glass began to make sense then. It was out of the Apocalyptic Vision on Patmos, "a sea like unto a sea of glass!"

"Exactly," said Tammuz. "Much of the Apocalyptic Vision was of ages long vanished when the Visionary 'saw.' Naturally, being human, he could not keep from 'coloring' his vision. It was our intention that it be so. Man could not know *all* . . . can you imagine what he would do, even now, if he, even one man of him, one city of him, one nation of him, possessed the secret of the Sea of Glass?"

"What good is it?" I asked. "A toy, no more. A take-off on video, the movies, radio maybe. I don't know what else."

"More than you could catalogue," said Tammuz. "At any moment I can look at any spot on the earth. I can then iris in any individual on that spot. I can talk to him, *if allowed*, and provided I give him, thus, no advantage over his fellows. I can change his whole life, provided I do it through his subconscious, and am willing to take the responsibility."

I stared at the man, for crazy though he might be—and nobody I ever knew looked *less* so—he was a man, one I liked, respected, and trusted.

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"Show me!" I snapped.

He showed me. He proved it. It still did not need to be much ahead of what the world of science—which meant every well read twelve-year-old dabbler—already knew. After all, *I* had come to the Gobi, following hunches and theories based on study, to advance the cause of science. This might be a Chinese who had done the same thing, hiding himself beyond the reach of American colleges and the Russian Gestapo.

"Nothing you can prove," I said. "Nothing that can't be faked. Any good Hollywood director can work it!"

He had shown me Washington, the President and his cabinet in a tense meeting. He had shown me Stalin in the Kremlin, listening to his stooges. I, who understood no Russian, could understand everything they all said, though they did not speak English or any language I knew. The Sea of Glass, by some method I did not yet see, was also a language unscrambler. I began to suspect it had possibilities even the Visionary of the Apocalypse had not guessed.

"Well, Carnes," said Tammuz, still amused, infinitely patient, "suppose you name it."

"You know, of course, why Gol Rank and I are in Gobi?"

"To check your theories relative to the Semitic wanderings in the wilderness!"

"Exactly!" I stared at him. If he and everything he represented lived in the eternal Now, and there were tricks he could play with time . . .

"Everything that has happened," he said calmly, "*remains*, no matter what. You would hear the cymbals of Miriam? It's as simple, with the Sea of Glass, as showing two doubting Thomases in a jeep! Want to see workmen on the Pyramid of Gizeh? Hear the shouts of the taskmasters? Watch the Hebrews make bricks without straw?"

"You know what I want," I said. "If I am on the right track, how about a little proof?"

Tammuz stared at me. "We never, except for grave reasons, or in times of world crisis, satisfy ordinary human curiosity, but this time I am allowed to do so. There is one condition: when you leave Shallajai you will remember none of it, either of you!"

I shrugged. I knew you couldn't blot out memory, even if you were Tammuz of Babylon.

"But I *can*," he said. "I *must*. You must attain information in the normal human way—if it is to be used!"

I think he pushed something else. I had noticed the intricate signs, cabalistic, weird, cuneiform, all around the rose quartz railing which separated us from the Sea of Glass. Suddenly, right under us, where we had seen ourselves as Tammuz had seen us, chasing goats in that fool jeep, we saw the marchers of long ago! There was no mistake about it. They were there, suffering as they marched, hunting the land that had been promised. I could see the gaunt faces of the starving, the thirsty, the endlessly wearied. I could hear the moans of men, women, children. And it all began near the encampment of Gol Rank and myself. I whirled and looked at Tammuz.

"Right under our camp?" I asked.

"Yes, else you'd never have been sent for, would never have been brought here, would never have been given this help."

"But these people all died before the movies, before video, before the Vision of the Apocalypse!"

"Correct," he said, "*and before the first Chinese, P'an Ku*! For your information, P'an Ku himself has stood right here and seen the wanderers, and to *him* it was just as long ago!"

"And I suppose *you* manipulated the Sea of Glass that he might see!"

Tammuz shrugged. "I did. I have been around since, more or less, the beginning of Now. I was one of the few charged with the care of developing man."

"I suppose, if I insisted," I said sarcastically, though I did not, even that early, doubt him in the least, "you could produce P'an Ku himself to convince me!"

"You will meet him during your indoctrination course here in Shallajai," said Tammuz, bowing. "You will meet many others, too. They are old friends, out of many long-agos."

I stared at him. This had taken seconds

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and had not taken my attention very appreciably away from the Wanderers. I looked back at them. I could see the sweat on the coats of their mules, horses, sheep and goats. I had not known mules were so old. I heard singing, then . . .

"You say these people, as I see them here, are *alive*?" I demanded.

"In time, yes, which is *Now*. It is most unusual. It has never been allowed before, but if you wish, you may talk to any one you select, here in the Sea of Glass!"

"You mean you'll *materialize* him, or her?"

"Not exactly. People do not *die*. They *change* . . . it's not easy to explain to the time-bound. But if you wish you have but to speak to anyone you see—I prefer you would speak to obvious leaders, all of whom understand the secrets on which Shallajai is founded—you have but to signal and that one will be here, beside you, even as I am. You can ask questions, and receive truthful answers to questions that may never be answered with your picks and shovels, your Chinese and Mongol laborers!"

Well, I didn't do it. I was afraid somehow, because, as yet, I could not explain it. I had seen enough of the Wanderers. Before I could say anything, Tammuz knew; the scene vanished back into its proper place in "Now." I raised my head. There were many other men, now, and women, elbow to elbow around the Sea of Glass. I could not help it; my eyes darted to the head and shoulders of the most exquisite woman I had ever seen or even dreamed of. I whirled to Tammuz to start asking questions. Tammuz looked grave this time, no amusement in his eyes.

"I haven't yet mentioned the fact," he said, "that with the Sea of Glass we probe Infinity, the Microcosm and the Macrocosm, beyond any limit we are now allowed to reveal. P'an Ku has stood here, for example, and talked face to face with Plutonians! The woman in whom you are interested, incidentally, is one of the greatest scientists in that part of the Universe where our responsibility runs; she came to us just now, via the Sea, from . . ."

"Venus!" I heard myself saying, and I didn't mean it as a joke or a wise-crack. She happened to fit and super-fit the Venusian legend. She looked up, met my eyes, smiled; my heart jumped up, spun around like a puppy chasing its tail, then lay down flat, figuratively at her feet.

"Mercury!" said Tammuz, shaking his head. "But Venus is part of her regular itinerary, so you are not so far wrong!"

Chapter III

MYSTERY OF THE SUMMONS

MAYBE you'd better hold your hat. Maybe you'd better prepare for some unusual mental gymnastics. For now it comes thick and fast, maybe before you can get your hands up.

Every human being on this earth, who has ever lived on this earth, including *you*, has visited Shallajai and talked with Tammuz of Babylon or one of his assistants. Some of you, a very few, *remember*. It is not intended that others remember. If you remember you are one of the chosen few. You are no better than your neighbor, but perhaps more advanced on the Highway of Life, the Ladder of Evolution, if you remember. For you remember only what Tammuz intends you to remember; you have earned the right to remember because you have proved you can be trusted with memory. That takes some explaining. And explaining takes time, human beings get bored; because they are bored they do not advance very rapidly. Mostly, I think, they go backward. If it were not for Tammuz and the entities he called his First Experts, mankind would go *backward* to complete destruction.

Listen a moment. Tammuz, with a flick of the wrist, a bat of either eye, could make all Sahara blossom like a rose. He could plant it, by proxy of course, with plants exactly suited to its every part, for the plants were grown in Shallajai; Tammuz grew them; pardon, *grows* them!

China, all of Asia, is by way of being a treeless waste. There are exceptions of course. But take China, a desolation. He

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could have done to China what he could have done to the Sahara. Tammuz and his brethren could have flowered the waste places of the world with plenty; he could have made it utterly unnecessary for man ever again to earn his bread by the sweat of his brow. He still *can*!

Earth, as we know it, is the arena wherein men struggle for existence, grow old in a matter of heartbeats, die in agony, or die slowly and long. Earth is the arena of want and desolation. But in Shallajai, the Shallajai of Tammuz of Babylon, the gent I'm writing about, everything existed to supply every lack in the world! Was gold needed? It grew in limitless quantities in Shallajai; it *grows* in limitless quantities. . . . I have difficulty speaking in the present tense, in remembering that riches beyond human conception, riches of the spirit and the flesh, exist and have always existed in the place called Shallajai.

"All you have to do," I said to Tammuz when we'd been in Shallajai a couple of hours and could have seen little of it, actually, "to make every man on earth utterly independent, is to open the granary doors of Shallajai."

He looked at me sadly. "That," he said finally, "is true."

"Then what kind of an expediter, coordinator, or whatever you call yourself, are you, to let man live in utter destitution when a flick of the wrist . . ."

"Man lives as he does," said Tammuz, gently interrupting me, "because he so elects. He has free will. He can do as he pleases. He pleases to do as you as well as I *know* he does. Who destroyed China's forests, turning the land into bare unproductiveness?"

"Why, er, I suppose the Chinese!"

"And their conquerors, yes; but they would not have been conquered if they hadn't earned defeat in war. Who do you suppose destroyed the fertility that once was the golden heart of the Sahara?"

I jumped at that. "Then it *was* fertile once!" I said. "There were great cities . . ."

Again he interrupted. "There have been great cities almost everywhere in the world you can name. There have been great civilizations even where the deepest seas now roll. A lot can happen, a lot *has* happened, in the last few billions of earth years!"

I stared at him, trying to picture even a little of the knowledge which must be his if he had been here since the Beginning, forever in possession of the Sea of Glass. My brain reeled with the possibility.

"You and your's," I said finally, "are actually the masters of the world!"

"No! *Men* are masters of the world. If they were not, if they had not been given dominion, we could do more. But that is not the law. We must obey the law, do you understand?"

"But in effect there is nothing you cannot do to, for or with, mankind. It is true, then, what one of ours recently said, that 'man is property!' "

"No, forever no! You are as I am, except that I have used my talents differently," said Tammuz. "You must work out your own destiny; that is the law. So when we see forests wasted, wars planned and fought when there is actually no reason, when we see men, crying women and starving children, dying by *millions*, how do you suppose we feel that we are not allowed to do anything about it, when we could do *everything*?"

"Then you're not master here!" I said. "For all your wealth and power you are not master here!"

"Is the earth master of the known universe? No, not even the sun is that! There are greater suns, suns beside which ours is a child's toy. I am an integer, just as you are."

"But who is to stop you if you turn loose all this power and wealth?"

HE COUNTERED with another question. "*What do you think would happen to it?* What, for instance, would you do with what you would surely call *your* share?"

I thought I could answer right away, just as anybody would have thought the same thing; but then no answer seemed to make the least bit of sense.

"These animals," he said to me once, "are as animals were *intended* to be, companions, friends and helpers of man—be-

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fore man decided he must rule, and they fled from him in fear!"

I tried to remember things: Francis of Assisi and his kinship with birds and beasts, of the great teachers to whom man had paid little heed; all had walked closely with the birds. And even our own Indians knew the language of the trees, of grasses, of flowers. Yeah? Who would get away with that kind of talk now? Nobody! You'd find yourself in the booby hatch if you tried it. Suppose I came in from the fields and gave my brother scientists messages from the flowers? You can guess what it would have been like. Yet painters, great musicians and poets, *know*. They don't know very well, but they *feel*, because feeling is all that man has left; he has lost everything else, as he has lost fortunes on a turn of the cards, the flip of the dice.

But back to our knitting. Every human being on earth has visited Shallajai, remember that. Not only that, but people, especially people in great trouble, visited Shallajai every time they fell asleep! Yes, that's what I said! Every time they fell asleep! That's why you *go* to sleep. Yes, when you sleep your body rests, but what happens to *you*? You go to Shallajai . . .

THIS is how it works. You know how Gol Rank and I got there. We actually entered in some fashion I'm none too sure of, probably were put to sleep first, through the Sea of Glass. That's what happens to *you*. You don't remember? Of course not. If you remembered you'd have an advantage over your fellows, because it is not intended that you remember.

Everybody dreams, *every*body, maybe not often, maybe not at all, *to remember*. How much do you think is real of that dream, how much false? Unless you're further along than most, the greatest percentage of it is completely false. It's the part you don't remember that's true. You went to Shallajai, if you merited the trip, either because you did something or failed to do something you should have. But it is not intended that you remember, *save subconsciously* so your memory *is literally smeared with meaningless dreams*, rubbed over you so you'll forget *what Tammuz and his brethren* intend you to forget!

The Sea of Glass, we soon saw, was the central or main Sea of Glass. There were branches, branch lines, if you like, to make it easier to grasp, all reflecting the Sea Itself. There were assistants of Tammuz, like telephone operators at a vast switchboard, allotted to each of the "Seas" which served a particular section of the world, a particular race, color, creed, even a particular industry. There wasn't, *isn't*, a time, waking or sleeping, when one human being anywhere is not under benign, friendly, even loving, observation—not only as to his actions, but as to his thoughts. His toil at whatever he is doing, wasting his substance or wasting himself, registers on the "Sea" which is responsible for his bit of earth—*every least single bit of it*. If he starts to do something wrong, though the effect of his action may influence the whole world for ages to come, even the mighty Tammuz can only advise him subconsciously that some other course is better. But the man does not have to follow Tammuz' advice. He can go ahead, bull along on his own, even if he wrecks the world, for that is the law!

"I don't believe it," I said, aghast when Tammuz explained it. I knew there was a great deal I did not get. "Suppose you show me how it works." I was paying little attention now to the other men and women who stood around the Sea of Glass. Most of them were from other systems in the Universe, here to take note of the operations of Tammuz. They did not *need* to come; they had Seas of Glass of their own, they *wished* to come . . .

"Well, New York is asleep," said Tammuz. "It is three o'clock in the morning. Pick someone you know there . . ."

I mentioned the first man who came to mind.

"Doctor Lestring, the surgeon," I said.

Instantly, there in the "Sea" was Doctor Lestring, asleep. Tammuz looked at him for a few moments. Then *he* told *me* all *I* knew about Lestring, and more. He spoke with respect of Lestring, one of the world's great surgeons.

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"In a few hours," said Tammuz, "he must perform a delicate operation on the brain of a delicate child, a child whom he realizes instinctively will become one of the world's great leaders if she does not die under the knife. He refused to operate yesterday; *he insisted he must sleep on it first!* That means he expects to come here. Now you will see why wise people sleep on their decisions, though they themselves may not know!"

Doctor Lestring then opened his eyes, though Tammuz had given no signal of any kind, and stepped out of the Sea of Glass. Just like that. There seemed to be two Lestrings, the man asleep and the Lestring who came to Shallajai. One could have been the soul, or spirit, of the other—but I, being a scientist, believed in no such claptrap!

"Good morning, Tammuz!" said Lestring in a voice I knew as well as I knew my own. "How are you, Carnes, Rank? Is Paracelsus waiting for me, as usual?"

I gasped. Lestring looked at me.

"Yes," he said, "*the* Paracelsus, who took surgery lessons under Hippocrates. I come to him whenever I doubt my own ability. Trouble is, I never remember. I won't remember when I go to operate in a few hours—*but I'll know just what I'm doing, and Leah Halleck will live to make a new bright world for crippled children.*"

Lestring turned and went away. His counterpart, asleep in New York, slept on—except that he sighed and turned his back on Tammuz, Rank and me!

"Actually then," I said, "Lestring has no say about it at all! He's predestined to operate on and save the life of Leah Halleck!"

"Tomorrow," said Tammuz softly, sadly, "he may decide, in spite of the fact that right this instant he is being shown how to save her life, that she is not strong enough to undergo the ordeal. Then she will, as you call it, *die!*"

"But not if you took the law into your own hands and *made* him operate successfully!"

"The life of one child, even one like Leah Halleck, weighs little against one man's will, his *free* will. If we were to *force* the issue, against Lestring's best judgment . . . well, take a look at the world you ran away from to hunt Semitic fossils! The world is filled with people who are in some way or other exerting their human will *against universal law!*"

I looked into his eyes, suddenly feeling naked, ashamed.

"And right this instant, in the back of your mind," he said to me softly, "you yourself are thinking that there must be some way you can heave me and mine out of here, and play godfather to all the world with what has been shown you here!"

I felt myself getting red all over, from heels to head, for Tammuz was right. I could see myself master of all this—I'll list a few more things in a moment—distributing largess to the world, stipulating first, *laying down my own law, understand,* that the nations of the world disarm, disband their military forces, smoke the pipe of peace together. Then I'd start working on families—*but always trying to enforce my own will!*

And just what, besides the Sea of Glass, did Tammuz have of use to the world? Atomic energy for commercial, for human comfort? He had it, the simplest kind of formula. A child could have worked it out. The latest in telephony? He showed me that the telephone, the telegraph, the radio, all the mechanisms of which we are so proud, were merely crude preparations for the moment when man could talk to and even visit, anybody on earth, in a heartbeat of time, merely by *thinking* of that one. Telephony, telegraphy, radiography, videography—all were hints of general clairvoyance, clairaudience, clairsentience, to come—when man had earned it!

The depths of the Pacific Ocean, just to cite one thing, seven miles down, in utter darkness too profound to be imagined even, under pressure nothing manmade could endure, could be, *can* be, turned into a Garden of the Gods, where under surroundings man has during eons forgotten, people of tomorrow may live and enjoy perfection.

"No place on earth or under it, above, below or *in* the seas," said Tammuz, "is beyond the *earning* of man. Thousands of

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times he has had the limit; as many times he has pooped the riches of the Cosmos away; Now he crawls slowly back, while My Masters watch, in absolute patience, hoping that *this time* he will use better judgment, knowing even as they hope, that he will do nothing of the kind. And that is not all. . . ."

"How much is a man of science supposed to swallow?" I asked savagely. "I may wish to ask something about the sun, moon, or stars!"

"Man must ride this merry-go-round," said Tammuz grimly, the first time he had been grim at all, *"until the very least among mankind*—the pygmy of Ituri forest, the Andaman Islander, the Gaiapo Indian, *or it might be you!*—has become as advanced as the Senior Entity in Shallajai! And even that is little more than a beginning, for after the earth there are other . . ." he slowed down there, stopped.

"It seems to me," I said, "as if it would never end."

"A simple fact you learned in Sunday School, George," he said gently. "Did not your elders promise you eternity? Then you became a scientist and refused to accept more than three score and ten years!"

"A new slant on time," I muttered, staring at the Sea of Glass, to which we returned after a leisurely walk in a near section of Shallajai. "You, Tammuz, and others like you, must become awfully bored with us. You've been here millions of years, waiting for us to amount to something."

"Why not?" he retorted. "I was, in effect, a pigmy of the Ituri Forest, an Andaman Islander, a Gaiapo Indian—I was even as low in the scale of evolution as *you* are! (I was none too sure he grinned!)—and Someone waited for *me!* The least I can do is pay my debts. That's true of all of us."

I tried to mask my thoughts from him, tried to think without thinking, without showing it. I could, I realized, pay all my "debts" of omission and commission to the end of time, just by grabbing Shallajai. I decided to do it—after I had got enough lowdown to be sure of working the combination.

If there was no chance, no accident, why had I been brought to Shallajai, anyway? I began to realize my near approach to godhood, my affinity with the great Workers Behind the Scenes.

I asked Tammuz: "Just why did you bring Rank and me here?"

"You are about to make discoveries it has been planned for ages that man shall have *exactly now!* You are here to know just what they are, so there will be no wild guesses!"

CHAPTER IV

THE WHEELS OF SHALLAJAI

"DO YOU believe in miracles?" said Tammuz. "Of course I know that, as a scientist, you don't. You're right; there are no miracles; there never were!"

I stared at this man who was himself, if we had not been entirely deluded, a miracle.

"There were and are no miracles," he was very grave. "Yet I tell you flatly now that Moses *did* strike water from the rock, did turn a staff into a snake before Pharaoh, did part the waters of the Red Sea with his wand so that his people could cross dry-shod. I tell you the most unbelievable of all 'miracles', that Joshua did in fact prolong the day in Ajalon. . . ."

I began to look incredulous at this point, without a doubt, as I thought of what staying the earth in its course for a whole day would do to the celestial set-up, to say nothing of catastrophic results on earth, but Tammuz nodded.

"It can be done," he said, *"if you know how, as did Joshua the Son of Nun!* You will know how, in your turn, for in your excavations, Gol Rank and Sherm Carnes, you will find the mechanical devices of Joshua, the rod or wand of Moses. . . ."

"Next thing," I said sarcastically, "you will be telling us we'll find the chariot in which Elijah took off!"

Tammuz smiled. "At least you *do* know of some of the hints that man has been given through the ages! Listen, you two, you want to know why you're here! This is the reason. You are going to re-indoctrinate your people—if they give you time enough. Not with the wand of Moses, or the ma-

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chinery of Joshua, or the chariot of Elijah; those are still too far in advance, in the future, even for people who can fly non-stop around the world. But you're going to give your people lost techniques which lead slowly, gradually, in accordance with your own laws of evolution, progress, up to these articles you will find in Shallajai. Your own great economists are insisting that there are too many people in the world, even when great devasating wars have just wiped them out by the millions. But I say to you that here Shallajai, in the bottom of the very pits you are digging now in the Gobi, seeking the secrets of the distant past, you will find implements whose secrets, if you discover them, *will make it possible for every human being in the world to live, anywhere on the face of the earth, in an area no larger than your great state of Texas!"*

"You have all these gadgets here, Tammuz?" I asked. I wasn't groveling or cringing to Tammuz. I'd never believed in a God who compelled men to demean themselves, or exacted sacrifice, or browbeat or punished them. Maybe I didn't believe in any at all, but even this Tammuz was far and away a greater being than the Master of any piece of literature I knew.

"Here we have long since come to the end of 'gadgets'," said Tammuz. "What are gadgets? What are airplanes, telephones, explosives? They are all brought together and constructed by *men,* from the ingredients which the First Experts, down the ages, have made ready for them. But whence comes the knowledge where from to make these things? First, from the Beings who guide the peoples of earth. . . ."

"Property again!" I said.

"No. In the world you know best the best-equipped lead the least-equipped, or try to. That's what we do—or try to do. And even the most powerful can do no more than try. So, you are going to bring new things, 'gadgets' if you like, to the world, but you are going to bring them in such a way that a man, *no man,* is at once completely equipped with the Creative Fiat. Gadgets come from men's minds—and the most nearly perfect gadgets of all, which the wise men of all ages have used, are men's minds. You will lead men just one, or perhaps two, steps further along the way to the spot where he can wave his hand, or not wave his hand, if he feels lazy, and create, as by a 'miracle', anything he wishes! Suppose one man could do that now?"

"If he were an American," I said, "he would create a super atom bomb and blast a big hole where Russia now is! If he were a Russian the United States would become, almost at once, a raging green sea! If he were . . ."

Tammuz held up his hand.

"So you see? Now, gentlemen, Sahara has been a waste long enough; a beginning must be made to restore it. That requires unusual knowledge. It requires the ability to alter weather over a vast area. . . ."

"Miracle?" I suggested.

"Machinery," he said. "Man *must* not be able to do it directly from mind *yet!* So, in your digging, three months from today, you will find models of rain-making equipment built before P'an Ku. It will look like an ordinary discus, such as your athletes throw. But it contains power, even after all these ages. Its insides contain mechanical contrivances whereby dampness in the air, even over Sahara, is collected above the land where the first work is to be done, and rain made to fall. . . ."

It didn't seem difficult, just hearing it. I could just see such a gadget, a Sea of Glass in Miniature, from which, perhaps the heat of the sun could be reflected, or the heat could be absorbed entirely, or as desired, and the weather regulated. . . .

"Communications," Tammuz went on, "in the flesh, are still man's greatest obstacle to brotherhood and understanding. It is notable that a *bomber* first flew around the world non-stop! But there is a faster way. One evening, after a certain event in Jerusalem, a Great Teacher suddenly appeared among His people, though all the doors were closed and locked! Remember it? Every person can do the same thing; but no man *knows* that he can. Nor will any man have such knowledge for ages yet to come. He has to be led up to realize the limitless extent of his own abilities and powers! It must be gradual. That is why

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you will also find an ancient instrument which, by the very nature of man, must be far less effective than this Sea of Glass!"

I interrupted him there, forgetting all about taking possession of Shallajai to make a good thing for myself out of it.

"I once read some silly Tibetan stuff about an Atlantean 'Door called Dox'," I said. "I never even dared let my fellow scientists know I read such stuff. But it was just a door that did not open, yet if you had it in New York and wanted to go to San Francisco, you regulated it to tune in San Francisco, stepped through the door and there you were—in San Francisco!"

"Crude," said Tammuz. "True, too. The Atlanteans did have it. But it is still far in the future for the world as matters now stand. Man is reaching for something like this—only he *thinks* he is making rockets that will travel around the world, or that he can fire at any spot on earth from some synthetic satellite of his own building. You're going to discover a vehicle called *kmerzed*. It resembles an airplane, slightly. When it crashed and plowed into the Gobi, millions of years ago, at the spot where you're going to dig it up and try to reconstruct it, it was traveling fifteen thousand miles an hour! It required no pilot. Any passenger could fly it. You just stepped into it, spoke into a receiver, explained where you wished to go, a record was cut, and *kmerzed* did exactly as the record *commanded!*"

"WHY could not the passenger simply command the *kmerzed?*" I asked. "Oh, never mind, I know. Even then the passenger could not be trusted with so much individual power; it had to be strained through something!"

"I am sorry," he said, "but that is true. It is just as true now. Man must be held in check by his machines, until he knows how to control himself; then he will be able to control the world; at which time the world will not *require* control!"

"Look," I said, "I disapprove of the world, including myself, as much as you possibly can, but let's be practical, shall we? You've shown me things, promised me others. You can do tricks with time. Good, cut back to the time when that rain-making disc you mentioned controlled the weather!"

He shrugged. "Naturally, it was over the Gobi, when the spot where you're digging now was a great city—called En-don!"

"En-don?" I repeated.

"People refer to it now as 'Eden'," he said, "and talk as if they knew all about it. Now, have a good look at En-don!"

In order that I should know exactly what he meant, he showed me first—and Gol Rank, of course—just what my Chinese and Mongols were doing back at the excavation. I expected to see them all loafing, Gol and I being absent, but they were working like beavers. Tammuz cut past them into the ground, down and down, and showed us the disc he had mentioned. First he showed us fragments, and my mind and Rank's began putting them together; but the Sea of Glass did it faster. Then there was the entire disc. The Sea of Glass began, seemingly, to ride back along that disc—well, you've seen in the movies how spinning wheels indicate the passing of time? Like that. The disc spun. Then it rested, atop a slender column of gleaming marble. Then the "lens" of the Sea of Glass trolleyed back, and we saw many other columns, with the discs atop them. We were allowed to see cross-sections of the discs, with machinery inside them. There was machinery inside the columns, too.

But that wasn't what got us the most; Tammuz had prepared us for that. Now the Sea of Glass spun us in the crucible of time somehow, and we saw the Gobi itself as once it had been, as complete and perfect in itself as was this strange area of Shallajai in which we now stood beside Tammuz to marvel. Rank and I both recognized landmarks before Tammuz had to mention them. But the Gobi we knew had no rivers—only the deep-down mysterious whispering of the wells of Shallajai. This ancient Gobi, or "En-don," was beautified by rivers and streams that were almost *alive* in their joyous usefulness. There were trees loaded with fruits. There were buildings that were music made visible; the whole *Gobi* was a city, not pack-jammed together, but every piece of land utilized, with the

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buildings set in parks, beside streams, musical waterfalls . . . well, it *could* have fathered the legend of Eden!

Briefly, without comment, Tammuz showed us houses where men and women played, gambled, threw other men and women to beasts. I didn't wonder, for very long, why he showed us *this!*

"They were getting ready even then," I said, "to poop the whole thing away!"

He did not even nod. He just looked sad, for a brief moment.

"You might as well see *kmerzed,*" said Tammuz.

"See it, at fifteen thousand miles an hour!" I said.

"No," he said, "ride in it. Here it is!"

There in the Sea of Glass, right under us, was the *kmerzed.* It wasn't an airplane but a rocket, by the looks of it. That it belonged in the ancient clay under our excavation I did not even think about just then.

"Where do you wish to go?" asked Tammuz. "Pick a spot where people are asleep; we don't wish to set the world by its ears!"

"I'll set down on the airfield at Belterra, in Brazil," I said. "But how am I going to be sure it isn't a dream?"

"Get out at Belterra," said Tammuz quietly, "and procure something that will prove it to you."

I remembered back to when I had spent some months at Belterra. There was a fence beside the airfield. A vine grew on it, a *maracuja peroba* vine, on which grew a lemon-sized fruit, juicy and delicious, which made my mouth water just to remember.

Tammuz touched the railing of the Sea of Glass. A door opened—*what kind of a door was this, of which he did not once speak?*—and Rank and I stepped down, into the *kmerzed.* It was commodious, comfortable. I spoke into the transmitter. "Take us to Belterra, Brazil, the airfield there, and land!"

I didn't say whether to go east or west. It didn't much matter, if memory served. It was about the same distance either way. One hour there, one hour back, if Tammuz wasn't hypnotizing us. It seemed less than that. In fact, my watch got it at forty-five minutes. We didn't feel a thing, see a thing. No bumping, no nothing! We just looked out and there was the airfield at Belterra, it was night, and I got out, went to the fence, picked half a dozen of the *peroba,* we got back into the *kmerzed.* We hadn't eaten half the *perobas* before Tammuz himself opened the door for us and I tendered him one of Brazil's nicest fruits. He shook his head.

"Naturally," I said, "if *peroba* grows in Shallajai, this can all be a trick!"

"It does not grow here, it just happens," said Tammuz, "which is exactly why I *hoped*—just *hoped,* mind you!—that you would collect the *maracuja peroba* to prove your journey to Brazil! Of course, if you doubt, and care to search through Shallajai. . . ."

I did not doubt—I told myself.

"I'm anxious, we're both anxious," I said to Tammuz, "to get back to our digging, since we now know what we shall find. Is there anything you wish to tell us before we ask your permission to leave?"

HE SHOOK his head slowly. His face was very serious.

"Since earliest times," he said, "no day has passed that mankind has not been told. First it was handed down verbally, from wise father to wise son—and men laughed. Then it was written down, and science called it myth. . . ."

"You mean . . . ?" I began.

"That every so-called miracle mentioned in every religious book in the world, was deliberately given the world in order to help mankind's scientists to advance the welfare of mankind. They were merely expected to analyze those 'miracles'; not deride, laugh at and cast them out. . . ."

"After all," I interrupted, "you'll have to admit that the plagues of frogs, flies, water turning into blood, scorpions, locusts and the like, are pretty hard to swallow!"

"Do you think so?" he said softly. "Then why do your military scientists wallow in dreams of *bacteriological warfare?* It's old stuff, gentlemen, old stuff! And the reporters of yesterday were sometimes just as inaccurate as they are today!"

I took that one on the chin.

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"We may return here when we've uncovered the disc and the *kmerzed?*" I asked.

"No, not as you are now, not in a jeep, not chasing goats!" he smiled a little. "There is a limit to what I am allowed to disclose. I have almost reached it. When you see me again you will see me as Lestring does, as almost everybody else in the world does; but you will not remember!"

We followed Tammuz back to our jeep.

We got into the jeep, started to say goodbye to Tammuz. But he wasn't anywhere, and Rank and I were just chasing goats over the face of the Gobi! When we realized, we headed back for our camp. We didn't talk.

CHAPTER V

AGELESS ARTIFACTS

WE DIDN'T tell ourselves we didn't believe it, we just didn't discuss it. There was the Brazilian fruit to remember, the visions of things past, of things to come—or had we seen any of the future?

Men are strange. It never occurred to us to wonder that out of all the world Tammuz had selected *us* to take messages to the world. We were "chosen." Everybody thinks he's "chosen" for something, and doubtless he is. As we shot back through the desert in a jeep whose motor now ran perfectly, I turned and looked at the goats. Who could know whether they were the same ones, and just what happened to us, and them? We could have driven into a dream of some kind. Maybe there *was* something queer in the waters of the deep wells of Shallajai, of which we had drunk thirstily.

We circled around the bodies of several dead men. The dog-bears were eating them. It was Mongol "burial." These dog-bears were definitely not friends of man! I didn't remember having seen one of them in the strange unearthly garden of Tammuz. There had been bears, and dogs, but the two combined, no.

There was some concern on the part of our Chinese and Mongol laborers when we got back to camp. When we got out of the jeep I stared at Gol Rank.

"You believe it, Gol?" I asked.

"I believe it," he said. "Have you stopped to figure out how much water we'll draw in the world when we are in possession of the disc and the *kmerzed* thing? We can be richer than Croesus."

"No," I said, "we can't. Do you think Tammuz wants us to have those gadgets for our personal use?"

"Look, sucker," said Rank, "while I remind you of something! We were digging in this hole *before* we got caught in a mess of ethereal rose quartz! We'd have found those gadgets with no help from Tammuz, provided they're down below us. If we hadn't gone chasing goats he wouldn't have been in it anywhere!"

"Then you *don't* believe," I said. "You don't think there is really any control over man's destiny, in spite of what we've been through?"

"I believe *some*thing, but just what it is I can't say," said Rank. "But listen a minute. While we were driving back from the dream section of Shallajai," there was something approaching contempt in his voice, contempt for me, contempt for himself, "I turned and look over our rear seat. You had to drive, see? Well, did I see any rose quartz, anywhere we saw it just before we came out of the Sea of Glass and found ourselves being hornswoggled by Tammuz? I didn't see anything—except sand dunes as far as the eyes could reach. NO rose quartz, nothing! We've been had, that's all. . . ."

"And if, inspite of us being had," I said, "we find the disc and the *kmerzed,* what then? And what of the fruit we picked up in Brazil?"

"I believe we experienced it somehow," he said. "That's what I mean when I say I believe. There's possibility in the human brain, even in yours or mine, beyond man's own conception, for look here! Suppose we *do* find the rain-making disc and the *kmerzed.* Didn't we come to the spot *before* Tammuz, just as I said?"

"Yeah," I pointed out, "but how did we happen to come to just the right spot? If, of course, we *did?*"

Gol Rank shrugged. "How does any explorer ever find anything! Something in him

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whispers—or . . . or . . . something! And you worked out a theory, remember?"

"With no discus in it, no *kmerzed*," I said calmly.

I made a mistake after that, but maybe I'd have done it again after knowing and thinking about it. I called our laborers around us. I explained to the coolies, to the Chinese and Mongols, that somewhere down under us were artifacts of absolute rarity. They hadn't been seen or suspected in the world since P'an Ku. They pricked up ears at mention of P'an Ku, for few outlanders find the name even in a cross-word puzzle. I had two foremen, a Chinese and a Mongol. Each racial group was handled by its own boss. The men understood that they were to be very careful. Many feet down, we did not know just how many, they would find certain things. I even went so far as to draw plans of them! Then I became aware that the Chinese and Mongols were staring at me with their mouths open.

"You just have to be careful not to break these things," I told them. "The disc is intact, but the other thing, which looks like an airplane, crashed here millions of years ago and broke up somewhat. I must have all the pieces so I can restore it!"

The men did not say anything. They did not even jabber, and when a coolie doesn't jabber he's very sick, dead, or *awed*. The two foremen waited after the men went back to their digging. The Chinese acted as spokesman.

"This is not good, Carnes *hsien sheng*," he said, the Chinese words meaning something like "Mister." "Even coolies know there were no airplanes, even a very short time ago! As for the disc, perhaps—but for weeks now we have been digging in cement-hard clay, thickened with pebbles, quartz, an occasional precious stone. There have been other things, but these were expected. Now the two *mei kuo jen* (Americans) go out into the desert, are gone some hours longer than expected, and return to tell us that somewhere under this clay that has not been disturbed since P'an Ku there are two especial *things!* The men do not understand. They will begin to think. They are already afraid of the bones, skulls and footprints we have found here! Is there something one might tell them? How does Carnes *hsien sheng* see deeply into the earth *now*, after all these months when he has not been able?"

Maybe there was a devil in me when I answered. I could see where superstition might get them down.

"Tell them," I said, "that I have it straight from P'an Ku himself!"

"Is this an order, *hsien sheng?* If it is, then not a Chinese or Mongol will work on beyond the moment I tell him! He will not believe it, but he will not work, fearing its truth! And if, when we do dig on, we *find* these things you mention . . ."

Both foremen shook their heads. Their faces were gray.

"They might kill both of you," said the Mongol, "to keep you from disturbing the relics of the ages—*P'an Ku's relics!*"

"Well, tell them we consulted an itinerant fortune teller we ran into at the Shallajai wells!"

I said that on the spur of the moment, thinking of the fortune teller every Chinese knows, the one with the can full of sticks on which fortunes are written, and the little bird that takes your money and selects a stick with your "fortune" on it. But Chun Juar, the Chinese, and Ta Kuei, the Mongol, didn't for a moment think of such a one. Both stared at me even more aghast. Then they looked at each other.

"That would be even worse," said Ta Kuei. "It has been known since the Shallajai wells existed, that they *whisper!* Some gifted persons can understand the whispering. Sun Yat Sen was inspired by whispers out of the wells. Long ago Genghiz Khan listened to the whispers. Emperors and empresses of China for ages have sent seers to listen to the whispers. . . ."

"True," said Chun Juar. "Is it not true of the Mongol rulers also?"

I was getting in too deeply. Gol Rank pulled at my arm.

"The foremen themselves will be leaving if you don't button your lips!" he told me. "Let's drop it and get busy with running our normal business."

I nodded, led the way into the pit, which

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covered an area of about fifteen acres, altogether, some more deeply worked than other parts, some scarcely scraped. It depended on where we found the most interesting artifacts. But I remembered something seen in the Sea of Glass, something perhaps not intended for me to see—the spot below which the disc and the *kmerzed* would be found. I walked right to the area above the disc, first, and Rank nodded; he had noticed, too. We gave that area to the Chinese, told them to work down carefully over a much wider area than was necessary. The *kmerzed* location was as far away as it could be from the disc and still be within the outlines of our original survey of the digging.

"Now," I bade them all, "*dig!* Your pay is increased fifteen percent, and we're going to work two hours more each day!"

Coolies didn't mind the additional work, but I should not have increased their pay. It suggested something they preferred not to believe—a feverish impatience on our part to find something—*something that possibly should stay buried!*

When I put Gol Rank over the Chinese end, with responsibility for the rain-making disc, I could just see him as overlord of the Sahara, or the Mojave, or Death Valley, turning it into a garden spot, any or all of them in turn, then starting a real-estate boom in each one, lining his pockets with more millions than any man before him ever had, even Midas, even Croesus. Only, I was sobered a little now. I was seeing, ever so blurredly, that it wouldn't do. If the world needed this sort of thing, and Heaven knew the world did, then no *one* man should have an exclusive on it—even *me!*

I took over the *kmerzed* area.

For a solid month we uncovered artifacts that would have turned the world green with envy and merely threw them out into the rubble we took out of the two pits. I fully intended to dig them out again at some later time. There weren't so many Dawn Men extant, and dinosaur eggs were not so plentiful that we could just shrug them away. But I was after the disc and the *kmerzed*. Every night, before we went to bed, Rank talked and figured. He covered sheets of paper with arithmetical progressions; he worked out algebraic equations; simple arithmetic wouldn't do to suit him.

"I believe it's here, Sherm," he said. "I *dream* of it. I see old Tammuz in my dreams once in a while, looking awfully stern and shaking his head at me, but that's just a dream, like the Shallajai dream we had. Yet I believe some of it, about the disc, because I want to, because I've always wanted to be rich, powerful, famous."

"Not even one nation, not even the United States," I kept telling him, "should have a monopoly on either the disc or the *kmerzed*. Tammuz intended for us to see that the *whole world derives benefit from what we find!*"

"And just what will the business men, the rulers, the generals of the world think of us if we don't feather our own nests?"

"They'll think we're visionary lunatics," I said, "but *we'll* know we're playing proper ball with Tammuz, P'an Ku, Chemosh, Baal, and the other Guardian Entities we didn't get around to meeting when we were being indoctrinated by Tammuz! That's his word, remember? We are to reindoctrinate the world!"

"I'm no world leader," said Rank. "I'm just an ordinary guy named Rank who never had two yachts to rub together his whole life! This is my chance. I'm not going to muff it."

THEN came days of discouragement, lack of belief, lack of faith—when even the quite frightened coolies began to perk up because it was clear we wouldn't find anything.

The disc came to view on the blade of a coolie's shovel, just like that. The coolie saw it and froze, like a statue. I just happened—or does anybody ever "just happen?" to be looking down into the disc pit when the disc showed up. Before anybody said a word Gol Rank knew. He whirled. It was as if all the Chinese had become statues on the instant.

Then Gol Rank jumped at the disc, grabbed it. I noted, just before that, in every visible particular it was one of the

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discs we had seen on the columns in ancient En-don.

Rank sat down with it on his knees. He leaned back against the wall of the pit. His arms sagged. The disc rolled off his lap. It didn't break. It wasn't made of the stuff that breaks. The ancient ones made *this particular disc to last.*

I dropped down the side of the pit where the coolies were still frozen. I took one look at Gol Rank. He was dead. Deader'n a door nail!

I knew he was dead, had known it while dropping into the pit. Looking back, I must have known it the first time he suggested that we make ourselves rich with our findings.

By a queer instant of clairvoyance—what else could it have been?—I knew that I could touch the disc without harm to myself.

I picked it up, turned to the coolies. They knew Rank was dead. They saw me hold the thing that had killed him. It was too much. They screamed, jabbered, fought one another until blood came, trying to get out. I didn't try to stop them. That was up to Chun Juar. He wasn't trying to stop them. He himself was fighting to escape from this devil pit.

After the Chinese were out I followed, taking it easy, all but forgetting Gol Rank for the time being. I sat down in my folding chair, in front of our tent, Rank's and mine, and looked at the disc. At once, as if I could see them behind my lids, I saw the discs of En-don the columns on which they stood—*and how their machinery worked.* In some subtle fashion, and at once, I was being shown how it was possible to make this disc practical.

A shadow fell on me. I looked up at Ta Kuei, my Mongol foreman.

"We're finding pieces of strange metal," he said. "My men are afraid to go on. They *won't* go on, for me. But if you, whom the buried lightning does not harm, were to promise them that they will come to no harm either, then I believe they will work on!"

I hoped so, too, for there wasn't a Chinese left in camp.

CHAPTER VI

START FROM SCRATCH

IT WASN'T a plane, I knew when I got the pieces together, many days later. It wasn't a rocket, either. It was a Lines-of-Force Machine of some sort. It followed certain waves. Could it have been *thought* waves? Thought waves slowed down by passage through the transmitter and the record from which its authority derived? I would never forget that two-hour trip to Brazil and return to Gobi, when I had spoken thus into the *kmerzed* transmitter.

"I wish to be taken to the airfield at Belterra, Brazil."

Thought slowed down by mechanical means! Well, why not? Beams of light were too fast, sound too slow. The rocket traveled at around fifteen thousand miles an hour. To think of traveling to Brazil required less time than that . . . but wait a moment!

If I were to *will* myself to Brazil, or anywhere, would I not have to see the way in detail, in the eye of my mind? Is that not exactly what happens when one flies anywhere? Someone else may do it, like a pilot who depends upon his navigator, but the navigator must know where he is every second of a long flight, either on instruments or "seat of the pants."

Quick as thought. . . .

It was something to go on. I have a good memory. I had made a little study of the *kmerzed* on the flight to Brazil. I could see the metal—unknown to me as yet—of the *kmerzed* being assembled. I could see this in my mind with each new piece we took out of the old clay under Gobi. My Mongols stayed on with me without argument when I made it clear that I at least *thought* there was no danger to them.

I buried Gol Rank. There was nothing else to do. I had the exact location for his family. I realized that he had died, not of anything that had shocked him, in the discus, but from a heart attack brought on by sheer excitement. But I'd never have been able to sell that idea to the Chinese, none of whom ever returned even for his money. In

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a way I was responsible for Gol's death; if I had kept my mouth shut about what I was sure we would find, deep down, they would not have gone nuts with fear when he died.

I did a packing job on the *kmerzed* and the discus. During my spare time I drew up plans for reconstructing them. Then, just to make sure they did not fall into wrong hands, I memorized them and threw away the plans. I had a feeling, all this time, that Tammuz was guiding and helping me.

I wasn't satisfied about Tammuz, you can be sure of that. And before I paid off my Mongols and broke up my camp in the Gobi, before, in fact, I did some additional digging and took possession of the materials we uncovered and treated so cavalierly while we were hunting for the discus and the *kmerzed*. I got thirty large cases of ancient artifacts which proved to me that this, the Gobi, had been the "wilderness" through which the Semites had wandered for forty years-centuries-millenniums; these artifacts would have delighted me beyond anything if I had never heard of the weather-control discus and the *kmerzed*. These two things, these "discoveries," overshadowed everything else.

And there were strings hanging out where Tammuz was concerned. I was not satisfied with the way that contact had ended. There were strings hanging out, *some*how. Maybe I *did* go to him for instructions while my "body" slept, but I did not remember, and it was not adequate as an explanation. It argued for acceptance of the soul, or spirit, as a fact, and I would have none of it, or *thought* I wouldn't.

There had been no rain, no wind, no storms on the Gobi since Gol Rank and I started our unplanned, historic goat drive. There should be jeep tracks.

First, though, missing Gol Rank as if he had been closer than a brother, I drove to the whispering wells of Shallajai. Deep, old, mysterious, dug by nobody knew whom or when, they were life to hundreds of Gobi Desert travelers.

I listened above the wells, seeking in the whispering some hint of the voice of Tammuz. I drank deeply and heartily of the water, on the off chance that there *was* something soporific in it. I waited to give it a chance. There was nothing, I felt, though I could have been mistaken. The legends of the wells had started *some*how, generations in the past. As for the whispering, well, there is always something mysterious about whispers in a deep well. There were no words for me in the whispering. And yet, Sun Yat Sen, if that legend were true, was a hard-headed gent; he didn't play the sucker easily. And Genghiz Khan was the greatest dictator in historical times—if *that* legend was true: that he had got inspiration from the whispers in the Shallajai wells.

I CAME away from the wells. All I needed now, in retracing our steps of that memorable day in the rose quartz, was to jump the same goats at the same place. It did not happen. I saw no goats. But I knew the spot where we had jumped them when I came to it. I found our jeep tracks quite easy to follow. The way led between two sand dunes. I watched right and left for the beginning of the rose quartz highway. It did not come. The jeep tracks just led on and on.

They turned left, naturally, where they had to stop. I stopped at the end of the jeep tracks, and stared in utter amazement—for leading on away was a clear opening in the sand dunes, and beyond the last marks of the tires were the footprints of the goats which had escaped us. No mystery about it at all; we had simply stopped, our motor stalled, and the goats had run on into the Gobi! There was no rose quartz, there hadn't been!

Yet how explain our advance information on the discus and the *kmerzed?*

I could almost hear Tammuz chuckling. I was so sure of it I stood up in the jeep and looked all around. Nothing. No goats. No dog-bears. No Tammuz. No Dream-Shallajai.

He had said I would not return as I was *then*—it suddenly came back to me. My only re-entrance to Tammuz' garden was via the Sea of Glass, but how. . . ?

"I know you're watching, Tammuz," I said into the clear air of the Gobi, "so here

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goes nothing—provided I can do a simple thing like going to sleep!"

I had a tarp in the jeep. I made a sunshade. I killed the motor. I made myself comfortable on the back seat of the jeep—no mean feat in itself. I refused to think of how Tammuz had constructed the Rose Quartz Highway, then struck it like a tent. Maybe he commanded Universal Material of some sort, mentally. He had at least got me hipped on the business of the power of mind.

I dozed off.

I stepped out of the Sea of Glass and shook hands with Tammuz!

"Do not regret your friend Gol Rank," was the first thing he said. "It was his time. He would have gone no matter where he had been. He has to start again!"

"I had to make sure it wasn't a pipe dream, Tammuz," I said.

"But to all intents and purposes it *is!*" he told me. "For you *are* here in a dream."

"I don't feel any differently, though I *know* it's a dream," I told him. "First thing, what about Doctor Lestring and Leah Halleck, did he operate?"

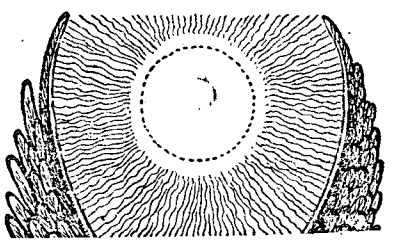
Tammuz smiled. "Of course, and successfully. He has been here many times since, to prepare for even more miraculous surgery! You, too, are back now—and never forget: *every human being comes here, to the seat of central control, whenever there is real need!* And only a few are allowed to remember in part, though never entirely. The rest we cause to be buried in trivial dreams. You, too, will forget. You will start from scratch with your two archeological finds when you waken. You will remember nothing of columns, of En-don, of inner machinery. . . ."

Then I awakened in the jeep, under the tarp, chuckling to myself. I hadn't tried to put something over. That would not have been cricket, but I had kept a careful diary of all this, so how could I forget? Had Tammuz actually *meant* for me to remember more than his laws allowed, to give me the bulge on other investigators into the past? Was I wrong in planning to use my notes?

I decided I wasn't, though the idea that I might not, sort of angered me.

I SPEEDED the jeep back to the camp. En-route I scared up a flock of goats I jammed on the brakes, halted until they were well beyond reach. I'd had enough of chasing goats. They got a man muddled, at least *these* had. Now I, simple though I was, was in position to set aside what had seemed to be a decree of Tammuz. He said I'd forget, but I knew I wouldn't. "Start from scratch," he said. I didn't need to. The innards of the disc, the capitals of the columns in En-don, the machinery in the columns; the details of the *kmerzed*. It was all in my head, never-to-be-forgotten. Yet when I began work, to my amazement I found myself unbelievably forgetful! My plans did not look right, nor did they work out. Nothing I "remembered" worked out. And all the time I kept trying to take advantage of what I had not been supposed to remember, but was *sure* I did, in spite of evidence to the contrary that made me think I was becoming senile, I seemed to hear an eerie bodiless chuckling which might have been that of Tammuz muted with distance—or maybe it would have sounded out of the depths of Shallajai's whispering wells.

I got nowhere, nowhere at all, until I resigned myself and started from scratch!



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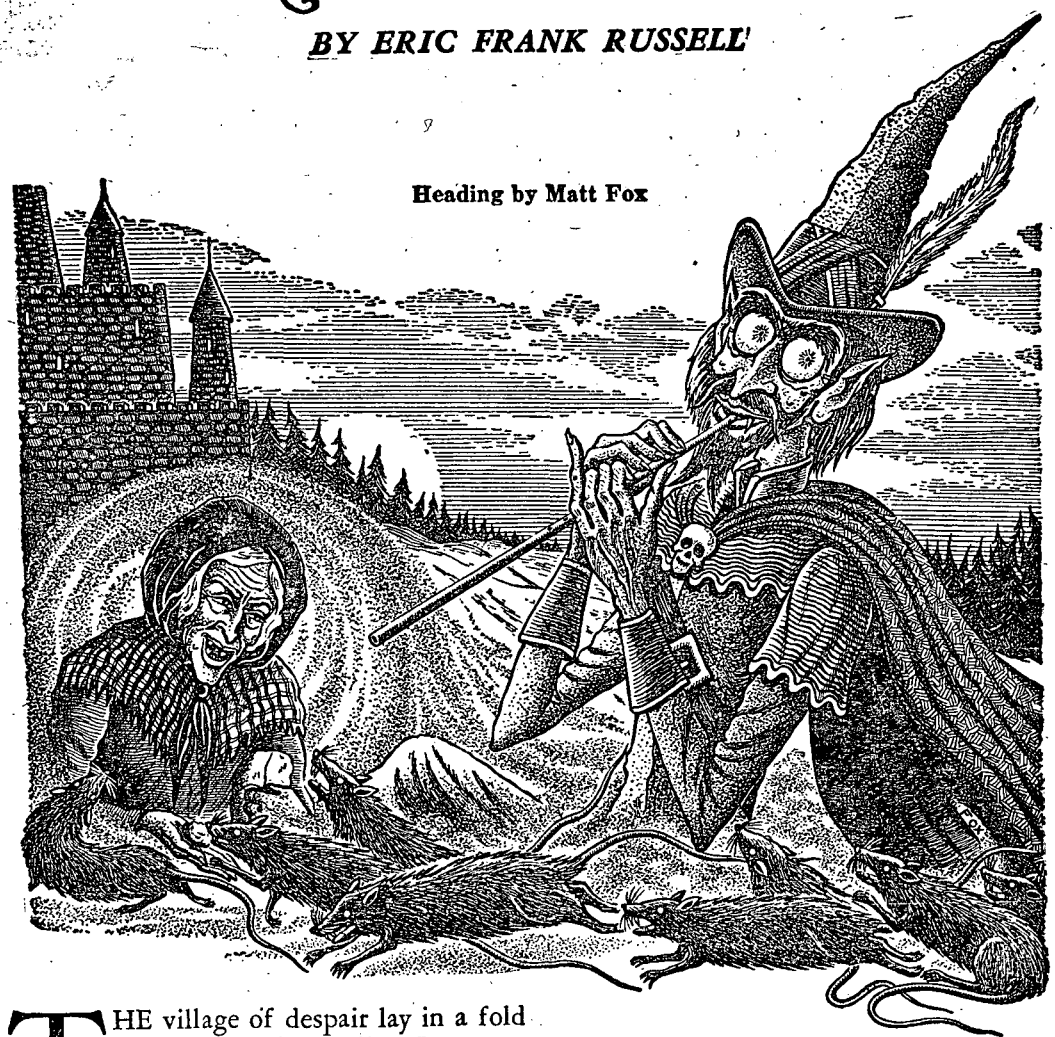
The Rhythm of the Rats

BY ERIC FRANK RUSSELL

Heading by Matt Fox



THE village of despair lay in a fold of tree-shrouded hills. Its name shall not be spoken, neither shall its nationality be told. There are those among us whose curiosity knows no restraint; others who are magnetically drawn by the dreadful. One must tell the tale in manner calculated to protect the foolish from their follies or not tell it at all. Suffice to say that the village was placed far off the beaten track even of foot-walking tourists, and its brooding inhabitants did not speak English on those rare occasions when they spoke at all.

There were sixty houses in the village, one-third of them straggling alongside the cattle-track which served as its main road, the rest climbing the heights behind and lurking half-hidden in a welter of pines, firs and mountain ash. All these abodes

. . . as unnerving to the listener as if a marble statue parted its lips and cursed!

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were of timber, highly ornamented, and would have been considered picturesque had they not oozed an elusive but easily sensed aura of overwhelming sadness.

Quiet, slow-moving folk lived in this forgotten hamlet, passing each other silently in the course of their daily tasks, fix-faced, fix-eyed, unemotional in the manner of those long emptied of human passions. Spiritual wells run dry forever. Shadow-people almost without substance.

I found this place by veritable accident. A plane crashed amid pines close behind the ruined castle of the Giant Ghormandel. Flung headlong into flexible pine which caught me, waved me to and fro before it dropped me into a bed of ferns, I was the sole survivor.

The plane crackled and spat and flared furiously a little lower down the hill. Adjacent tree trunks exploded like cannon under pressure of boiling sap and resin. Ferns withered, turned brown and paperlike, became flames. Rabbits scuttled in all directions, weasels with them. Birds whirred away squawking. Smoke poured cloud-high. Blackened bodies posed roasting in the fuselage, and the pilot—still in his cockpit—sat with bowed and steaming head. It was terrible.

To tell the truth, the scene sickened me far more than did the narrowness of my own escape. That sudden, unwanted cremation amid the trees, with the castle ruins grinning like rotten teeth, and the dark, unfriendly green of the hills, the scowling skies all made a scene such as one carries for the remainder of one's life. It was a picture of death, red and rampant.

There was nothing I could do to help anyone, nothing at all. The plane's complement already was far beyond human assistance. Somewhat bruised and considerably shocked, but otherwise unharmed, I made my way down the hillside and found a tiny brook which I followed as it meandered through a thickly forested area that still sloped, though gradually. The atmosphere grew heavier, more morbid as I descended. By the time the village was near the air had become thick, oppressive and lay like a weight upon my mind. It created that unpleasant sensation of an impending headache that never manages to arrive.

A smell of wood-smoke came from the village although no chimney was visibly active. Not the pleasing, aromatic scent which greets one in wood-burning communities, but rather an acrid odor suggesting the combustion of rotting bark and dried fungi.

Four people saw me as I came by the end pair of houses. Two men, two women, all middle-aged. Their attire was well cared for in the matter of stitching and patching but the colors had long faded toward dark browns and grays. It was sartorial companionship for the colors of their souls, all browns and grays. The two men bore shepherds' crooks; the women carried brass-bound wooden buckets. All four looked at me with the subdued surprise of those who have not registered a true emotion for countless years.

As I came up to them, the elder man said swiftly to the others, speaking in a language I could understand, "Something has gone wrong. Leave this to me." He took a step toward me, lifting his brows inquiringly.

I told him about the plane, pointing to the castle of the Giant Ghormandel and the pale, thin wisp of smoke creeping upward behind it. My speech was swift, rather incoherent, and made with complete disregard of grammatical rules of a language which was not my own. Nevertheless, he got the gist of it. Events must have tried me more than I'd realized, for immediately it was evident that he understood, I felt weak in the pit of my stomach and sat in the cattle-track to beat myself to the fall. The world commenced whirling as he bent to support me, stooping over me like a mighty ghost.

Later, it could not have been much later, I found myself in bed staring at a row of copper pots lined upon the mantelshelf, and a religious picture on the wall. The pots were dull but not dusty. The picture was faded, a little spotty. The window curtains had been darned but not dyed; they swayed in a slight draught, old and colorless. Even the wallpaper had been carefully stuck down

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where it tended to curl but was so aged that it should have been replaced years before. The general impression was not one of extreme poverty, but rather of tidiness which has been brought to its minimum in terms of bare necessity, a natural neatness which has been deprived of heart by causes unknown.

Presently the man to whom I had spoken came in. Let him be called Hansi because that was not his name. He came to my bed, blank-faced as a wooden image, and addressed me in tones devoid of vibrancy. It was like hearing the mechanical voice of an automaton.

"You are feeling better?"

I nodded. "Yes, thank you."

"That is good." He hesitated, went on. "Had you any friends or relations in that machine?"

"None."

If he was surprised he did not show it. His eyes turned toward me, turned away. He thought awhile.

"We have sent a party to recover the bodies. The authorities will be notified as soon as possible."

"You could telephone them," I suggested.

"There is no telephone. There is no car. There is nothing." He said it in a dull monotone.

"Then how do you—?"

"We walk. Did not the good God give us legs with which to walk? So we walk along eighteen miles of tracks and woodland trails and across two rope bridges to the nearest telephone. No vehicle can get here. The bodies will have to be carried out." His eyes came back again. "As you will have to be carried if you cannot walk."

"I can walk," I told him.

"Eighteen miles?" His eyebrows rose a little.

"Well . . . well—" I hesitated.

"It is a pity the hour is so late," he continued, staring at the window as if it framed something pertaining to his remark. "Night comes upon us very soon. If you had been here earlier we might have got you away before the fall of darkness. But now"—he shook his head slowly—"it is impossible. You must stay—one night." He repeated it, making it significant. "One night."

"I don't mind," I assured.

"We do!"

I sat up, putting my legs out of bed and pressing my feet on the floor to feel the firmness of it. "Why?"

"There are reasons," he evaded. Going to the window, he peered out. Then he closed the window, doing it with considerable care, making sure that it latched tightly and that the latch was firmly home. Finally he fastened the latch with a strong padlock. It was now impossible to open the casement, while its panes were far too small to permit escape after the glass had been removed. Patting the pocket in which he had put the key, he remarked, "That is that!"

After watching this performance I had a deep and frightening sense of imprisonment. It must have shown in my features, but he chose to ignore it.

Facing me, he asked, "Do you like music?"

"Some," I admitted.

His lips thinned, drew back to expose white teeth, and he said with a sudden and surprising venom that shocked me, "I hate music! We all hate music!"

This contrast with his previous impassiveness lent a terrible emphasis to his words. It was an uncontrolled burst of passion from a source I'd mistakenly thought dried up. It had all the elements of the unexpected, unnerving the listener as if he had heard and seen a marble statue part its lips and curse.

"I hate music! We all hate music!"

Without saying more, he went away.

SOME ten or fifteen minutes afterward I decided that boredom served only to enhance hunger. The recent disaster still affected me, the thick, cloying atmosphere weighed heavily upon me. I needed something to eat and I yearned for company other than that of my own thoughts. Putting on shoes, I pulled open the only door and left the room.

Going slowly down an ornate but unpolished wooden staircase, I reached a small hall. A dull fire glowed at one end, gave off the acrid smell noticed earlier. Nearby,

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a crudely-wrought table was covered with a gray cloth. The walls were paneled, without picture or ornament of any kind. A bookcase full of dusty, seldom-used tomes stood at one side.

There had been time only to survey all this when a woman appeared through an archway at the other end. She was forty or thereabouts, tall, slender and as sad-faced as any yet seen. Though her features remained set, a most peculiar expression lurked within her eyes as she looked at me, a sort of hunger, an intense yearning tempered and held in check by horror.

All she said was, "You wish for food?" and her eyes tried to draw me to her while, at the same time, thrusting me away.

"Yes, lady," I admitted, watching her and wondering what lay behind that peculiar gaze. Her desire for me was in no way embarrassing. Indeed, I felt within me that it was clean, decent, but pitiful because of its thwarting.

Without another word she turned, went into the kitchen beyond the arch, came back with black bread, heather-honey and fresh milk. I sat at the table and enjoyed my meal as best I could despite that she spent the whole time standing near the fire and eating me with her eyes. She did not speak again until I had finished.

"If you go outside you must be back before dark, well before dark."

"All right, lady." Anything to please her. Inwardly, I could conceive no prospect more dismal than that of wandering around this village after dark. It was dispiriting enough in broad daylight.

For some time, I don't know how long since I did not possess a watch, I explored the hamlet, studied its houses, its people. The longer I looked at them the more depressed I felt. Their abodes were strangely devoid of joy. The folk were quite uncommunicative without being openly unsociable. None spoke to me, though several women looked with the same hungry horror displayed by the one in Hansi's house. It was almost as if they desired something long forbidden and triply accursed, something of which I was the living witness, therefore to be both wanted and feared.

My own uneasiness grew toward twilight. It was the accumulative effect of all this unnaturalness plus the gradual realization that the village was lacking in certain respects. It had vacuums other than spiritual ones. Certain features normal to village life were missing; I could *feel* them missing without being able to decide what they were.

Not until dusk began to spread and I reached the door of Hansi's house did it come to my mind that no truly domestic animals had been visible. The place was devoid of them. I had seen a small herd of cattle and a few mountain goats, but not one cat, not one dog.

A moment later it struck me with awful force that neither had I seen a child. That was what was wrong—not a child!

Indoors, the tall woman gave me supper, early though the hour. As before, she hung around pathetically wanting and not-wanting. Once she patted my shoulder as if to say, "There! There!" then hurriedly whipped her hand away. My mind concocted a scarey notion of her quandary; that to give comfort was to pass sentence of death. It frightened me. How foolish it is to frighten oneself.

Soon after total darkness Hansi came in, glanced at me, asked the woman, "Are the casements fastened? All of them?"

"Yes, I have seen to them myself."

It did not satisfy him. Methodically he went around trying the lot, upstairs and downstairs. The woman seemed to approve rather than resent this implied slur upon her capabilities. After testing each and every latch and lock, Hansi departed without another word.

Selecting a couple of books from the case, I bore them up to my room, closed the door, examined the window. The latch had been so shaped as to fit into a hasp, and the padlock linking the two was far beyond my strength to force open. So far as could be told, all other windows were secured in similar manner.

The place was a prison. Or perhaps a madhouse. Did they secretly consider me insane? Could it be that they had not actually gone to the wrecked plane because they thought my story a lunatic's fancy? Or, con-

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versely, were they themselves not of sound mind? Had fate plunged me into some sort of national reservation for people who were unbalanced? If so, when—and how—was I going to escape?

BEYOND my window ran a footpath edging the gloomy firs and pines that mounted to the top of a hill. The woods were thick, the path narrow and shadowy, but a rising moon gradually illuminated the lot until one could see clearly. It was there, right outside my window, that I saw what will remain in my worst dreams forever.

The books had amused me for three hours with a compost of outlandish stories and simply expressed folk tales of such a style that evidently they were intended for juveniles. Tiring, I turned down the oil-lamp, had a last look out of the window before going to bed.

The two men were strolling along the path, one bearing a thick cudgel held ready on his shoulder, the other carrying a gun. Opposite my window they paused, looked into the trees. Their attitudes suggested expectancy, wariness and stubborn challenge. Nothing happened.

Continuing their patrol, they went three or four paces, stopped. One of them felt in his pocket, bent down and appeared to be fumbling around the region of his own boots. I had my cheek close against the cold glass as I strove to see what he was doing. A moment later I discovered that he was feeding a small rat which was sitting on its haunches and taking his offerings in paws shaped like tiny hands.

They walked on. The rat followed, gambolling behind them, its eyes gleaming fitfully in the moonlight and resembling little red beads. Just as the two men passed out of my sight several more rats emerged from the undergrowth and ran eagerly in the same direction.

Sneaking out of the door, I crossed a passage, entered the front room which was furnished but unoccupied. This room's windows overlooked the cattle-track which formed the main stem. In due time the two men returned to view, complete with cudgel and gun. They had the wary bearing of an armed patrol performing a regular and essential duty. Eight rats, all small and crimson-eyed, followed very close upon their heels.

As they neared my vantage point a woman came out of the house right opposite, seated herself on its step and tossed tit-bits from a large bag on her lap. Rats swarmed around her, scuttling gray shapes that came from the shadows and the darker places.

I could not hear their excited squeaking; the casement was too close-fitting for that. The woman reached out her hand and petted one or two and they responded by fawning upon her. If only the light had been stronger I am sure it would have revealed her formerly pale, wan face now glowing with love . . . love for the rats.

Daytime surliness, secret fear, a mixed desire and revulsion for the lonely stranger, night-time affection for rats—what did all these things mean? It was too much for me. I had nothing in common with isolated mountain folk such as these. Tomorrow, at all costs, I must get away.

By this time the patrolling men had passed on and the woman was alone with her rodents. Returning to my own room, I had another look at the path, saw nothing other than a solitary rat which ran across as if anxious to join its fellows in the village. The moon was a little higher, its light a little stronger. Dark conifers posed file on file, a silent army awaiting the order to descend the hill.

I went to bed, lay there full of puzzled, apprehensive thoughts, and—let me confess it—nervous, uneasy, too restless to sleep. As the night-hours crawled tediously on and the moonbeams strengthened, the air grew lighter, colder, less oppressive, more invigorating.

This peculiarity of the atmosphere waxed so greatly that it created a strange tenseness within me, an inexplicable feeling of expecting something grave and imminent. So powerful did this sensation become that eventually I found myself sitting up in bed, cold and jumpy, ears straining for they knew not what, eyes upon the brilliant window which at any moment might frame a face

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like none seen before in this or any other world.

That such pointless but wideawake anxiety was silly, I knew full well, yet I could not help it, could not control it. I strove to divert my mind by wondering whether that woman was still bestowing love upon her rats, and by listening for the passing footsteps of the patrol.

Then, as my eyes remained fixed upon the casement, something came through as easily as did the moonbeams. One moment there was the utter silence of a waiting world; the next, it was through the window and in the room with me.

IT WAS nothing that I could see. It could only be heard and then not with the ears. Insidiously it penetrated the locked timber frame and tight panes of the casement, pierced the very walls of the house, passed through the bones of my skull and registered deep within my mind. A thin, reedy fluting which sounded sweet and low.

So soft and surreptitious was the sound that at first I mistook it for a figment of the imagination, but as I sat and stared at the window the music persisted and gradually swelled as if its source were creeping nearer, nearer.

Presently it was quite loud though still within my mind and completely unhearable with my ears. It waxed and waned, joyful and plaintive by turns, sobbing down the scale and chuckling up it, weeping a little and laughing a lot. An outlandish theme ran through its trills and flourishes as a cord runs through a string of pearls. There was a weird rhythm beating steadily within the tones and half-tones, a haunting off-beat, fascinating, mind-trapping—and beckoning, continually beckoning.

Somehow I knew that it was for my mind alone, that others in the village could not hear what I could hear. It went on and on, calling me, summoning me, and its spasms of laughter drove away all fear until I wanted to laugh with it, carefree and joyously. So powerful was its attraction that it drew me from bed, toward the window where I stood and stared into the moonlight. There was nothing voluntary about that action. My bemused mind obeyed the urge without previous thought; my legs responded to my mind and bore me to the window. I got there with no remembrance of the going. I merely arrived.

The pines and firs still stood in close array. The path was clearly lit and completely empty. Not a soul was to be seen, yet the eerie music continued without let or pause and the whole world seemed to be waiting, waiting for some unguessable culmination.

My face was pressed close against the glass, almost trying to push through it and get me nearer, if only an inch nearer, to that glorified flood of notes. The lilt chimed and tinkled like fairy bells within my brain, and as it repeated again and again its quality of attraction grew progressively stronger. It was a case of familiarity breeding desire where, had I only known the truth, there would have been inutterable horror and a mighty fear.

At moments the tonal sequences suggested speech though I could hear no actual words. But words came with them into my mind from I knew not where, insinuated with wondrous cunning beyond my capacity to understand. It was as if certain ecstatic chords conjured parallel phrases, creating a dreadful dream-poetry which percolated through the night.

Oh, come and tread the lazy leaves
And dance through scented heather,
Play hide and seek amid the sheaves,
Or vault the hills together.
Cast care away before the dawn;
With me for everlasting
Run free while mothers sit and mourn,
A little rat . . .

I lost the run of words just then because a brief glimpse of color showed between the standing trees while the music grew enormously both in volume and enticement. My whole attention remained riveted upon the trees until shortly a being stepped forth and posed upon the path, full in the light of the moon.

Tall and terribly thin, he wore a bi-col-

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ored jerkin of lurid yellow and red with a peaked and feathered cap to match. Even his up-pointed slippers were colored, one yellow, one red. A slender flute was in his hands, one end to his mobile lips, the other aimed straight at my window. His long, supple fingers moved with marvelous dexterity as he subjected me to a musical stream of irresistible invitation.

His face! I looked upon it and did not cease to look upon it all the time I tore at the casement's latch, heaved upon its chain, struggled desperately to burst the lock asunder. I wanted to get out, how madly, insanely I wanted to get out, to run free beneath the moon, to dance and prance, to mope and mow, to gabble and gesticulate and vault the hills while mothers mourned.

Unknown to me, my own voice alternately moaned my mortification and shouted my rage at being thwarted while I lugged and tugged in crazy endeavor to tear the window wide open. My ears were incapable of hearing my own noises, or any others for that matter. I was concentrating tremendously and exclusively upon that magnetic tune coming from outside and the moonlit visage of he who was producing it. A pane of glass broke into a hundred shards and blood flowed on my hand, yet I saw nothing but the face, heard nothing but its song.

It was an idiot face with enormous laughing eyes. A drooling, drooping, loose-hung, imbecilic countenance in which the optics shone with clownish merriment. It was the face of my friend, my brother, my mother, my boon companion, my comrade of the night, my only joyful ally in this sullen and hostile world. The face of he without whom I would be utterly alone, in ghastly solitude, for ever and ever, to the very end of time. I wanted him. Heavens, how hungrily I wanted him! Beating at the window, I screamed my desperate need for him.

THERE were feet moving below somewhere within the house, and heavy feet coming upstairs, hurriedly, responding to a sudden urgency. If my ears heard them they did not tell me. I stood in the full, cold glare of moonlight and hammered futilely at my prison bars and drank in that idiot face still uttering its piping call to come away and play.

Just as someone pushed open my bedroom door the flute-player made one swift and graceful step backward into the trees. At the same moment there came from the side of the house to my left a tremendous crash like that of an ancient and overloaded blunderbuss. Leaves, twigs and bits of branches sprang away from the trees and showered over the yellow-red figure.

The music ceased at once. To me its ending was as awful as the loss of the sun, leaving a world swamped in darkness. Verily a light-o'-laughter had become extinguished and there was nothing around me but the gray-brown souls of the immeasurably sad.

I clawed and scrabbled at the casement in futile effort to bring back the magic notes, but while the torn leaves still were drifting the fluter receded farther into the shadows and was gone. Once, twice there was a gleam of color, yellow and red, in the tree gaps higher up the hill. After that, no other sign. He had escaped to a haunt unknown; he had gone with his calling pipe and his sloppy face and his great, grinning eyes.

Hansi came behind me, snatched me away from the window, threw me on the bed. His big chest was heaving but his features were as though set in stone. Having reached its extreme my emotional pendulum was now on its back-swing, a revulsion was making itself felt. I offered no resistance to Hansi, made no protest, but lay on the bed and watched him while my mind incubated a terrible fear born of the narrowness of my escape.

Moving a heavy, wheel-back chair near to the window, Hansi sat himself in it, showed clearly that he was there for the remainder of the night. He did not say a word. His bearing was that of one whose only weapon against powers of darkness is an uncompromising stubbornness.

Increasing coldness persuaded me to pull the bedcovers over myself. I lay flat on my back, perspiring freely and shivering at the same time, and vaguely sensing the stickiness of partially congealed blood on one hand. Sounds from outside came clearly through the broken pane: a dull snapping

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of trodden twigs, stamping of boots, mutter of voices as hunters sought in vain for the body of the hunted.

Soon I went to sleep, exhausted with a surfeit of nervous strain. Dreams came to me, some muddled and inconsequential, one topical and horribly vivid. In that one I was blissfully running at the heels of a prancing imbecile, drinking in his never-ending song and following him through dell and thicket, across moonlit glades and streams, climbing higher always higher until we reached Ghormandel's shattered walls. And there he turned and looked at me, still piping. I was small, very small—and had a thin, hairless tail.

THEY rushed me away with the morning. I had breakfast in a hurry, set off with Hansi and a solemn, lantern-jawed man named Klaus. A few women stood at their doorways and watched me go, their eyes yearning and spurning precisely as they had done before. I felt that they regretted my departure and yet were glad, immensely glad. One waved to me and I waved back. No other responded. The sadness of the village deepened as we left, deepened to an awful sorrow too soul-searing to forget.

One hour's march, fifteen minutes' rest; one hour's march, fifteen minutes' rest. At a steady pace of three miles an hour the trip was easy. By the fourth rest-period the giant's castle had shrunk to no more than a faintly discernible excrescence upon a distant rise. I sat on a stone, watched the nearest trees and listened with my mind.

"Hansi, who was it that came in the night?"

"Forget him," he advised curtly.

I persisted, "Does he belong to the ruined castle?"

"In a way." He got up, prepared to move on. "Forget him—it is best."

We continued on our way. I noticed that neither man eyed the trees as I eyed them, nor listened as I listened. They progresesd in stolid silence, following the path, looking neither to the right nor left. It seemed to be accepted that by day they were free from that which was to be feared by night.

Midafternoon, footsore but not tired, we arrived at a small country town. It may have been sleepy and backward, but by my standards it was full of vivacity and sophistication. One could not help but contrast its bustling liveliness with the dreary, anaemic place from which I had come.

Hansi had a long talk with the police who made several telephone calls, gave me a meal, filled up forms which Hansi signed. They issued me with a train-ticket. Hansi accompanied me to the station. There, I used half an hour's wait to pester him again.

"Who was it? Tell me!"

He gave in reluctantly, speaking like one forced to discuss a highly distasteful subject. "He is the son of his father and the son of his mother."

"Of course," I scoffed. "What else could he be?"

Ignoring me, he went on, "Long ago his mother used her evil arts to kill his father Ghormandel. From then on she ruled the roost by fire, bell, candle and incantation—until our reckless forefathers had had enough of her." He paused a moment, stared dully at the sky. "Whereupon they trapped her by trickery and burned her for the foul old witch she was."

"Oh!" I felt a cold shiver on me.

"And then they hunted her son, her only child, who was half-wizard, half-witch, but he escaped. Hiding in a place afar, he developed his dark talents and bided his time for vengeance."

"Go on," I urged as he showed signs of leaving it at that.

"When he was ready, he tested his powers in a distant town. They worked perfectly. So he came back to us . . . and took away our children."

"What?"

"He charmed them away," said Hansi, grim and bitter. "Every one but those able only to crawl—and even those strove to squirm from us. From that day to this he has slunk around like a beast in the night, waiting, always waiting. Most of our women are afraid to have children. The few who dare have to send them to distant relatives until they reach adulthood or, alternatively, lock them in the *kinderhaus* between every dusk and dawn." He glanced at me. "Where

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I was locked for many years. Where you were locked last night."

"Only at night?" I asked.

He nodded. "There is no peril by day. Why, I do not know. But always he is ready by night, ready to take a child—and give us back another rat!"

"You mean . . . he changes them?"

"We cannot say for certain. We suspect it. We fear it." His big hand clenched into a knotted fist. A vein stood out on his forehead. "Children have gone, fix-eyed, with outreaching hands, like blind ones feeling their way—and rats have come back, tame, playful, wanting food and mother-love." His voice deepened, became harsh. "Some day we shall deal with him as our forefathers dealt with the witch who bore him. If the people of that distant town had killed him when he was in their hands—"

"What town?"

He said, briefly but devastatingly, "Hamelin."

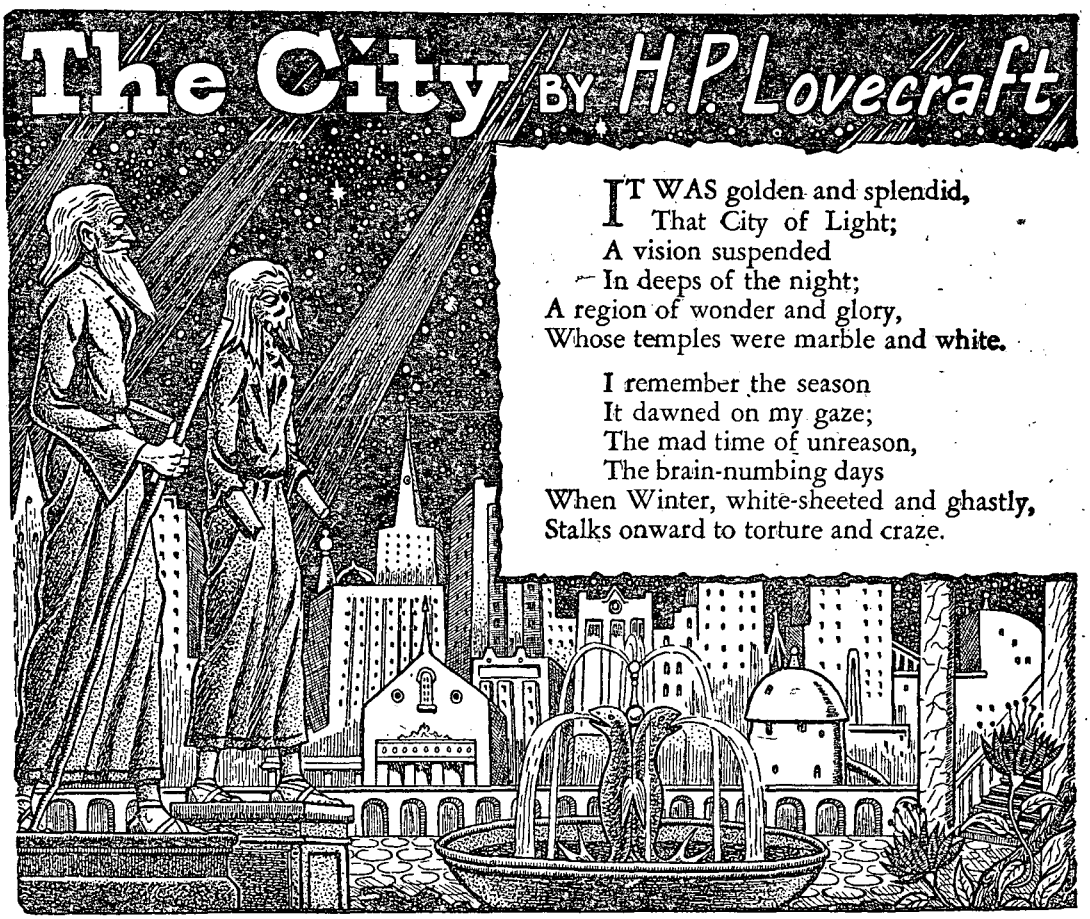
Then the train came in.

AT THIS date I often wonder whether the stones of the Giant Ghormandel's castle still rot upon that fateful hill; whether far beneath them lies that accursed village in which it is dangerous to be born. I wonder, too, whether that long, lean shape in red and yellow yet roams light-footed beneath the moon, laughing and gibbering and piping its terrible invitation.

So far, I have had no desire to return and see for myself. The elements of dread are stronger than curiosity despite that the passage of years has made it safe for me to go. It was anything but safe when I was there. Then, I had needed the watchful protection of the sad ones at a mere nine years of age.

The City

BY H. P. Lovecraft



IT WAS golden and splendid,
That City of Light;
A vision suspended
In deeps of the night;
A region of wonder and glory,
Whose temples were marble and white.

I remember the season
It dawned on my gaze;
The mad time of unreason,
The brain-numbing days
When Winter, white-sheeted and ghastly,
Stalks onward to torture and craze.

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More lovely than Zion
It shone in the sky,
When the beams of Orion
Beclouded my eye,
Bringing sleep that was filled with dim mem'ries
Of moments obscure and gone by.

Its mansions were stately,
With carvings made fair,
Each rising sedately
On terraces rare,
And the gardens were fragrant and bright
With strange miracles blossoming there.

The avenues lured me
With vistas sublime;
Tall arches assured me
That once on a time
I had wandered in rapture beneath them,
And basked in the halcyon clime.

On the plazas were standing
A sculptured array;
Long-bearded, commanding,
Grave men in their day—
But one stood dismantled and broken,
Its bearded face battered away.

In that city effulgent
No mortal I saw,
But my fancy, indulgent
To memory's law,
Lingered long on the forms in the plazas,
And eyes heir stone features with awe.

I fanned the faint ember
That glowed in my mind,
And strove to remember
The aeons behind;
To rove through infinity freely,
And visit the past unconfined.

Then the horrible warning
Upon my soul sped
Like the ominous morning
That rises in red—
And in panic I flew from the knowledge
Of terrors forgotten and dead.

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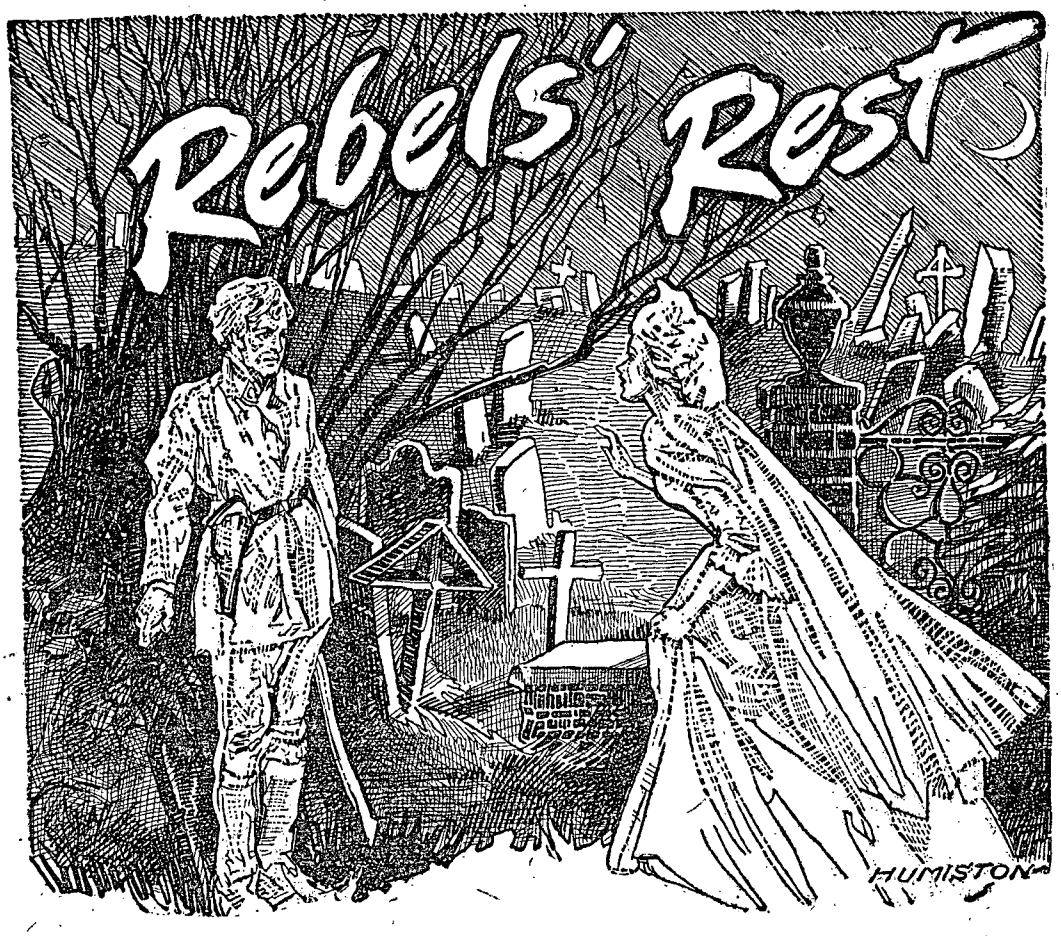
"If you're a natural man, God save ye; but if you're a Thing o' the Darkness...."



BY SEABURY QUINN

EILEEN walked faster as she neared the cemetery. It was not like an Irish graveyard, this little Pennsylvania burying ground, not like the little acres planted to God's harvest which she had known at home. There was no church to send the music of its bells across the low green billows of its mounded graves, no yews and holly-trees in which the kind winds whispered slumber-songs, no lich gate at its entrance underneath whose gable the tired living and the peaceful dead might pause a moment in eternity ere they went diverse ways. Like most things in this strange new land it seemed to be entirely functional. Just as no one ever thought of dropping into the cool, whisper-haunted shadows of the church for rest and prayer and meditation on a summer's afternoon, so no one ever thought of going to the cemetery save when friends or relatives were buried. No one ever thought of stopping there to kneel beside the grave of some loved one and whisper, "God give you rest and caring, dear soul!"

They seemed to dread the dead in America. At home it had been different. Kinfolk and friends and neighbors did not

Heading by Fred Humiston

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change essentially when they moved from their cottages to the churchyard. But . . .

She drew her hooded cape more closely round her and walked faster as she reached the cemetery wall. Perhaps the dead were unfriendly in America. So many of the living were.

It was in 1918 that Chris Huncke met Sheilah Maclintock. He was a Pennsylvania Dutchman, big, blond, rather stolid, unimaginative, and very handsome in his American uniform. Sheilah was his opposite, small, black-haired, blue-eyed, as typically Irish as a sprig of shamrock. She was a member of the Women's Motor Corps, and piloted an antique Daimler with the expertness of a racing driver, making mock of London fogs, policemen, two-star generals and even second lieutenants with sharp-witted Hibernian impartiality. Christian fell in love with her at first sight, Sheilah needed several looks before she gave her heart and unswerving devotion to the big, inarticulate American.

He brought her back in 1919, rushed her round New York in a deliriously ecstatic honeymoon, then took her to his farm near Chambersburg, where he shed his uniform and the never-quite-convincing air of gay insouciance he had worn with it, and reverted to type.

His father and his father's great-grandfather had been farmers, sturdy folk who held their land by grant from Governor Penn and later stubbornly against both redskins and redcoats. Their ways were right and all their judgments true.

Sheilah stood it for as long as she could, which was not quite a year. The atmosphere of the old house, the seldom-opened "best room" with its horsehair furniture, waxed flowers and shell ornaments spread like a miasma over the entire place, stifling her. Who could sing songs of the mountainy men of Donegal or the leprechaun or the *gean canach,* the love-talker, with a picture of *Grosvater* Huncke, dressed in broadcloth and starched linen and bearded like a billy-goat, scowling disapprovingly down at her? Who could stand the dour, uncompromising religiosity of the neighbors?

She loved the out of doors, did Sheilah Maclintock, the soft, sweet rain, the limpid sunshine, the springiness of fresh green turf. One day as she walked home from the village the urge to feel the caress of the roadside grass against her feet was more than she could withstand, and so she dropped down on a wayside boulder to peel off shoes and stockings when who should drive by in his Stutz Bearcat but Emil Herbst, son of Max Herbst, the president of the savings bank.

Prohibition had not yet come to America, but foregleamings of its high morality had reached the county, which had voted dry at the last election. Consequently nearly every second shop in the village was a speakeasy, and when Emil gathered with other village *jeunes dorés* behind Gus Schwing's pool parlor that evening he had provocative things to say concerning Sheilah's pretty feet and legs and Sheilah's deportment on the public highway. The story of her escapade spread with fissionable swiftness through the village and surrounding country, and next morning Mrs. Friedrich Eichelburg was early on the telephone.

As she took up the receiver Sheilah heard the sequenced clickings of a dozen others being lifted. Everyone on the line was indulging in a little morning's eavesdropping.

"Good morning, Mrs. Huncke," her self-appointed mentor greeted. "I feel it is my Christian duty to tell you—" then for the next half hour she discoursed upon the differences between American morality and the loose-reined mores of decadent Europe.

"Ochone!" exploded Sheilah when she could wedge a word in. "Your Christian duty is it, ye *sthronsuch?* Faith, 'tis meself that's after thinkin' ye'd be servin' both your God and neighbors better if ye kept your sharp nose out o' other people's business!"

THE ladies of the congregation didn't quite draw their skirts aside as she passed after that, but she was not invited to their *kaffee klatches,* nor to help with the church suppers, nor serve on their committees. Perhaps it would not be quite accurate

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to say that they sent her to Coventry, but certainly they consigned her to Birmingham.

And so, before a year had passed she packed her scanty wardrobe, for she'd take nothing Christian's money bought, and set out for the home she'd left six years before when she went off to do her bit in the Great War.

She hitch-hiked as far as Harrisburg, and there she found employment as a waitress and saved every spare penny till she had enough to pay her steerage passage back to Galway. She left no note of farewell, and if Christian made an effort to find her it was not apparent. The ostracism which the neighbors had visited on his wife had extended to him; he was a gregarious soul, and life had not been pleasant on the farm since Sheilah came. When the days stretched into weeks, and the weeks to months, and still no word of her, he gradually accepted the verdict that she was "no better than she should be," and found contentment if not happiness in a second marriage.

Sheilah shared a cottage with her aged Uncle Brian, cooked his meals and washed his clothes and worked his patch of garden, for he was infirm with rheumatism, and also something of a *sleiveen,* which is to say he was a man who'd rather take his ease than not, and didn't worry overmuch if the weeds grew waist-high. It was a bleak, bare spot on which the cottage stood, all day and night they heard the angry surges of the Atlantic, in summer there was salt spray in the air, in winter there were bitter winds and storms. Before she'd been home two months Sheilah gave birth to Christian's child, a daughter whom she named Eileen.

She had small traffic with the country folk, and they in turn were reticent, respecting her privacy. If on occasion neighbor women speculated over a pleasant scandal-flavored dish of tea that she was neither wife nor widow, they kept their speculations to themselves and caused her no embarrassment.

Each night when Sheilah knelt to pray she begged, "God keep and prosper him," and when she rose from her knees it was with that sick, awful feeling of emptiness which one who has not lost the thing that she most loves cannot know. "*Ullagone, avourneen,*" she would whisper, "we loved each other so! Where did all the beautiful, sweet love go? Why did you ever let 'em take you from me—and me from you?"

Then one night when she had reached thirty-eight and looked at least fifteen years older, Sheilah heard the Woman of the Shee sing underneath her window, and knew her time was come. "I'm goin', pulse o' me heart," she told Eileen, "and it's precious little I can leave ye. In the ginger jar fornenst the clock's a hoard o' twenty pounds. 'Twill care for my buryin' and pay your passage to your father in America, and for the love he bore me when we two were wed he'll take ye in and look after ye. Bid him a kindly greetin', child, and tell him that I loved him to the last."

It seemed to Christian time flowed backward for him when Eileen arrived. She had blue-black Irish hair and intensely blue eyes; her skin was like damask, glowing, warm; even the dimple in her pointed chin and the soft-lipped, tender smile of her were reminiscent of her mother. He felt as if Sheilah had come back to him, and the old love woke and stirred the spiced embalmings in its tomb. She was his daughter, yes, but she was something more, she was the reincarnation of the first and only real love of his life.

And because he loved her he was harsh with her. Her every little fault was magnified because it seemed to detract from the ideal of perfection he imagined her to be, and he was heavy-tongued in his scoldings.

But if Christian lashed his daughter with scourges his wife Beulah scourged her with scorpions. If Beulah Huncke had once been pretty nothing in her makeup testified to it. Everything about her was sharp with cutting sharpness. Her thin shoulders, her small, bright, vindictive eyes, her narrow profile, her thin, long hands and feet revealed her as a woman of edges, not curves. She wore her hair in a small knot at the back of her head, and drew it back so tightly that it seemed to make her eyeballs pop; her voice rasped like a file on steel, as if there were a grit of malice in her throat. Heaven had

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denied her offspring, and this frustration added gall and wormwood to the acid of her nature. In Eileen she found someone on whom she could vent her spite against life.

That afternoon she had been more than usually unbearable. "I s'pose you figger on settin' 'round and waiting for your pap to die and leave the farm to you?" she asked Eileen. "Well, leave me tell you, Missie, you'll never get an inch o' *this* land. I'll see to it that he cuts you out o' his will. And meantime there'll be no idle hands around here. I need some things at Eberhardt's. Go get 'em for me. Right away, not next week." She handed Eileen a small shopping list—thread, needles, pins, little, unconsidered trifles that could be packed in a pocket—and, "Now, off you go," she ordered, "and see that you get back by supper time. No traipsing off with men, the way your mother—"

"Leave my mother out o' this, ye *collich,*" Eileen broke in with a wrathful sob. " 'Tis a thing you're not fit to soil her name with your foul tongue!"

THEY said that ghosts walked in the little cemetery after sunset. Ghosts of the men who lay in Rebels' Rest.

Eileen had heard a dozen different versions of the story, yet all were substantially the same. How John McCausland's men had ridden into Chambersburg that morning in July of '64, levied a tribute of a hundred thousand dollars on the town, then burnt it to the ground and rode away with shouts of laughter. By God, their cause might be a lost one, but they, at least, had singed old Grant's whiskers! And then the tale went on to tell how the militia and the enraged farmers poured a spilth of lead on them as they rode pellmell to rejoin Jubal Early, how saddle after saddle had been emptied, so that where six hundred laughing, roistering bully boys had ridden into Chambersburg that morning a scant five hundred reached McConnellsburg.

Death had wiped out animosities, so when the rebels had retreated the farmers gathered up their dead and laid them side by side with demurely folded hands on their breasts and caps pulled down upon their faces, and when a plot had been marked off for them in the graveyard old Pastor Brubaker had read his office over them.

They had been buried properly, those wild Virginia lads, with prayer and Scripture reading, aye, and a word of forgiveness from the pastor, but still men said they could not rest. Some said they found the cold earth of this northern country a hard bed; some—and these were the majority—declared they hungered for revenge.

The whispering night wind chased the clouds that clawed with ghostly fingers at the newly risen moon as Eileen reached the cemetery gate, and for an instant everything was almost bright as noon, then a black cloud wrack slid over the moon's disc, and shadows obscured everything.

She felt everything inside her coming loose, and had no notion what to do about it as the cloud-curtain moved away and she saw a form by the grilled gate of the graveyard.

It was a man—or shaped like one—a slim and neatly built young man with sunburned cheeks and a thin line of dark mustache across his upper lip. He wore a gray suit and long boots, a yellow kerchief looped about his neck, and a little yellow cap with a black leather visor was set jauntily upon his curling hair.

"Ovoch!" Eileen felt the hot breath churn in her throat. "If you're a natural man, God save ye, sir; but if you're a Thing o' the Darkness, Christ's agony between us!"

"Faith, 'tis a long time I've been waitin' for a civil word!" The young man smiled and raised a hand to his cap in semi-military salute. "Thank ye kindly for your courtesy, me dear. I could not spake till I was spoken to, an' though I've waited more nor eighty year before this selfsame gate the only greetin' I've received until jist now has been a frightening squeal."

"God save us all," Eileen quavered, "you're Irish!"

"As Irish as they come, me jewel. I'm Teig McCarthy—Teig O'Shane McCarthy, late—too late, God knows!—o' th' parish o'

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Clondevaddock in th' County o' Galway."

Fear slipped from Eileen as a wave slides off the beach: "And whatever are ye doin' here, poor creature?" she asked.

"*Ochone,* 'tis a long story, so it is, yet not so long as I could wish for," answered he with an infectious grin. " 'Teig, *avick,*' me father—may th' turf lie lightly on him! —says to me, 'there's naught but mortgages to be raised on th' ould place, an' precious few o' them. Ye'd best be goin' to Ameriky to seek your fortune, as your Cousin Dion did.'

"So off I goes like any silly goose o' Westmeath, an' prisently I comes to rest on Misther Dabney Fortesque's plantation in Virginny. There's war abrewin' in th' States, an' prisently they're callin' ivery able-bodied man to th' colors. You know how 'tis, pulse o' me heart; a fight's a fight to an Irishman, an' divil a bit cared I which side I fought on, so long as they were givin' me a horse to ride an' three meals ivery day an' now an' then a spot o' pay.

"Then off we rides, an' prisently we comes to Chambersburg where we scares th' Yankees out o' siven years fine growth before we sets th' town ablaze about their ears. But as we rides away one of 'em gets me in th' chist wid his bullet and drops me deader nor a herring! Ah, well, I don't know as I should complain. 'Twas war, an' if he hadn't shot me 'tis altogether likely I'd ha' shot him. At any rate, they gave me dacent buryin', an' here I've been for more nor eighty year—"

"But why is it you're walkin' now?" Eileen demanded. "Is it that ye have a debt unpaid, or sins upon your soul—"

"Whist, dear one, don't be talkin'!" he broke in. "We're a queer lot, an' a lonesome lot, we dead folk from th' *Innis Fodhla.* Were you yersilf in some strange land for eighty year an' more, an' niver able to go back, there'd be a hunger on your soul for news o' home. Isn't it so?"

"It is!" Eileen agreed fervently. "And ghost or man, 'tis glad I am I've found ye, Teig McCarthy, for 'tis meself that comes from County Galway, with the heart o' me a-breakin' to go home."

IMPULSIVELY she put her hands out to him. "*Och,* Teig McCarthy, can't you see me heart is hollow with homesickness?"

"Hold hard, Eileen *alannah!*" he warned. "I'm yearnin' for ye like a drunkard for his draught, but if ye put your lips to mine ye join me. Mind ye, girl, th' quick an' dead can't mingle, an' th' dead may not come back!"

"No matter, Teig *avourneen,*" she breathed softly. "No—matter—" Her voice sank to a muted whisper and her eyes closed as she leant toward him with parted lips. "Ah, Teig, Teig McCarthy, ye jewel o' the world!"

Slowly, deliberately, he drew her to him, put his arms about her, kissed her on the mouth. He kissed her slowly, bending her head back against his arm till she felt weak and helpless, and glad to be that way at last. A cloud-veil crept across the moon like a blind being drawn, and darkness spread over the landscape. All about them was the scent of pine trees and the stillness of the night.

Supper time came at the Huncke farm, but no Eileen. Night passed and morning dawned, cool, clear and lovely, with limpid, bright pellucid air and sunlight sparkling over everything. But no sign of Eileen.

With dogs borrowed from the sheriff's office they traced her from the village to the cemetery, and at the gate the hounds gave little frightened whimpers and cringed against the deputy.

There was a susurrus of gossip at the next meeting of the Ladies' Sewing Circle. "The cemetery, eh?" Mrs. Thea Hauptmann shook her head like one who fears—and hopes for—the worst. "The cemetery. H'mm. A nice, secluded, woodsy place. Like mother like daughter, I always say. You listen to me once. That girl went off with someone!"

Which was unquestionably so.

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. . . is now a sinister, sullen carmine in hue, so that it resembles a lake of blood.

Woe Water

BY H. RUSSELL WAKEFIELD

WEAR LODGE.

Oct. 3rd: At last! What a huge relief to be away from all that foul publicity, the brutally cynical reporters, the cruel animal stares of the mob, those hard-eyed detectives, hoping to get their hands on me, and all the bestiality I've been through during the last month.

Heading by Charles A. Kennedy

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This house is, of course, much too big for just Barratt and me, but I was in no mood to be selective and took the first more or less suitable place that offered. One thing, my privacy will not be violated here. We are two miles from the village and the grounds are extensive and well wired-in. I shall be merciless to trespassers.

Only ten anonymous letters this morning —the rush is over! This experience has taught me what sub-human devils people can be, and what a lust consumes them to believe the worst and grind into the mire the unfortunate who is *down*. As if any sane person could possibly believe I wouldn't have done, and didn't do, my very best to save poor Angela? Of course that perverse fool of a Welsh coroner was responsible for much of my tribulation. He should have realized that when I said it was Angela who suggested going bathing that night it was simply a slip of the tongue. (What a strange displeasing cry that is! Bird or beast?) As for that bruise on the head, it could *not* have been acquired *before* death, as that fool of a doctor suggested. Absurd! Impossible! And what conceivable motive had I for ridding myself of her! We had our differences like any other married couple—no more, no less. She was a little difficult at times and no doubt, I was too.

As for her money—I never wanted it; I had enough for my simple wants, and I didn't care if she didn't leave me a penny, though I'm quite sure it was untrue she was thinking of making a new will disinheriting me. Sims, her lawyer, must have misunderstood her, and his evidence, again, made a very bad impression. Everything seemed to conspire against me at that inquest and the "Open" verdict was meant as a slur on me. Of course it ought to have been "Misadventure"! I am becoming more and more convinced that some men are born unlucky, born in the Red, destined inevitably to suffer, the pack of Fate stacked rigorously against them, always that Red turning up to consolidate their doom.

I am going to keep a diary for the future. It will be something to do, and help, perhaps, to comfort and clarify my mind. I shall be very lonely for the rest of my life, I suppose. Barratt is an excellent servant and a good enough fellow, but an uneducated man is never really company for an educated one, and I don't believe he really likes me, even though he has been with me so long. Angela was his favorite. I am also going to prepare a statement giving the true version of these events, so that when it is read after my death it will be understood how terribly I've been the victim of circumstance, of shameful suspicion and malignant tongues. (There's that cry again!) It is strange and awful to realize how a perfectly innocent man can be slandered and tortured as I have been. It has made me much more sympathetic and understanding towards unlucky men, so-called "failures," for I see clearly how easily they can fall into ghastly traps, as I did, and how their fate can pursue them to the bitter, hopeless end.

I STILL dread the postman's knock, but, though I'm sleeping very badly, I think that recurrent nightmare of choking and struggling, which is so unnerving, is, perhaps, not quite so vivid. Curiously enough, I have at times a powerful sense of Angela's presence after dark; so odd because she never entered, or even heard of, this house. It will probably fade after a while. If only the dead could speak! (There is that cry once more! What can it be?)

Oct. 4th: I took this place in such a hurry—almost panic—that I had never properly explored the grounds till today, when I strolled around with old Carlman, the gardener. He is a grizzled and rather unforthcoming rustic, at least he was hardly polite to me, though I provide his bread and butter. Of course he has heard things and I am hardened to that sort of treatment by now. To my astonishment I found there is a pool, a small lake, actually, in the southeast corner of the estate. I suppose the reason I didn't notice it on my one hurried visit is that it is entirely surrounded by a barrier of weeping willows. It is an ellipse in shape, about a hundred yards across the major axis, eighty across the lesser. It is an odd, slate-back hue, due,

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perhaps, to the over-hang of the willows and the shadows they cast.

The old man surveyed it with some solemnity, and almost made me laugh for the first time since *it* happened, by informing me its depth was unknown, bottom in the middle never having been reached, a ludicrous yarn which I'll disprove before long. I got the impression he is somewhat nervous of it, and it is undoubtedly sombre and forbidding. He told me it was called "Woe Water" and used to be on common land, but was enclosed—polite term for "stolen"—many years ago, and that the villagers have never forgiven this. "It's always been a place of sin and death," he said, an enigmatic remark, which I found by cross-examination meant a favored venue for suicides—fifteen in his lifetime! This sounds hardly credible, and no doubt he was drawing the long bow. I asked him in a joking way why the sparse inhabitants of Drarley Parva were so addicted to self-slaughter. "There are wicked men here as everywhere," he replied, "and they come to the water to cleanse away their sins." By which I deduced he belongs to the Bible-thumping brigade. "And their scarlet sins color the water," he went on, "so that when there is a body within it, it takes the look of blood, and the body troubles the water while it is lying within it, troubles it for seven days, and on the seventh day the people come to meet and greet the dead man, and his sinful body comes up white as snow and picked clean of its evil flesh."

"How d'you mean 'troubles it'?" I asked as seriously as I could manage.

"It is all astir," he replied, "wind or no wind, and the dead man's wave runs across it."

Just a bit of yokel myth-making, of course. I asked him if there were any fish in it, and he said he didn't think so.

At that very moment there was a huge "rise" out in the middle—a monster carp, I imagine, and I said mockingly, "What about *that!*" But he just muttered and hurried away.

Paid the bill for Angela's funeral today, as they've been pressing me. A hundred and forty pounds; extortionate, of course, but then they know I daren't query anything in my position, and naturally nothing could be too good for her. A peculiarly infamous anonymous letter this morning—fifteen pages! Would you credit that anyone could be so sparking with venomed malignity as to spend what must have been hours composing such a vicious screed? And the writer's no half-wit either. He makes what he is pleased to call "six points which indicate irrefutably your guilt." In the course of time I am going to get down on paper a complete answer to this cowardly, knavish brute, point by point.

I HAVE several times alluded to a strange piercing cry which I hear as I sit writing late at night. It comes from the direction of the pool and is made presumably by some water bird. A heron? I do not know. Apart from fishing, I am very ignorant of country matters, and I mean to study the birds and beasts which visit my domain. There it is again! It is an almost human, despairing note. Rather blood-chilling; rather too reminiscent of——no! I won't even think of such a comparison. That is craven and contemptible, and I must train my mind away from all such frailties. My nerves have enough to carry as it is.

I'll order a small rowboat for the lake and try for that big fish. I've drunk too much whiskey today. I never used to indulge like this, but I think it will help me to sleep. Sense of Angela's presence very strong at the moment.

Oct. 5th: Been in poorish spirits today, bored and lonely. Thinking too, of my poor dead father, who suffered, as I am suffering, and from that odious woman, my mother. Getting tired of my own company, I suppose, but it can't be helped and must be endured. Everyone of my so-called "friends" would cut me dead if he met me in the street. Barratt is no good to me; he is sullen and irresponsive. That cry is becoming rather too *much*—very oppressive. It starts at dusk and recurs at intervals from then on. Curiously enough, I could see no signs of any water fowl when I visited the

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lake today. Perhaps they just come there to roost. I'll go out there one night with a gun, for I fear that thing responsible, whatever it may be, will have to die. There it is again!

That anonymous slanderer's first point was that Angela was afraid of water and would never have bathed that night unless I'd forced her to. What nonsense! *I'm* the one who fears water, always have done so since that fortune-teller warned me against it years ago, but I've fought the phobia with some success. It is true, as that chambermaid said, that I wanted Angela to come with me. It was a lovely night, I dislike being alone in the sea, and I thought a bath would be good for her nerves. But that spying maid was lying when she swore she overheard me *threaten* Angela. It was spite; I should have tipped her more at the end of the first week in the hotel.

I wonder if cotton wool in my ears would help to damp and dim the stridency of that cry? I'll try it. I've finished a whole bottle today. I must strive to cut down.

Oct. 6th: Seven anonymous letters this morning. One included my horoscope, says I'll be dead before the end of the year, which "will be good riddance of a bestial wife-murderer." Some nice people in the world. Took another stroll with old Carlman this morning. We visited the pool and I questioned him some more. He says they never drag for the bodies which, he repeated, always surface again on the seventh day and the villagers flock down to see them rise. Well, they won't do that again while I'm here. There'll be no more suicides in my time, the suicidal trespasser will be prosecuted as rigorously as all others. He'll have to select another spot. I asked him about water-fowl.

"None ever come here," he said, "and no bird visits these trees." And, indeed, I confess I haven't seen or heard one in the neighborhood of the pool *by day*.

The second point made by that cowardly swine is that I am a strong swimmer and that Angela was a poor one. Not so poor, really! And that I deliberately took her too far out, and asks, why I didn't stay near her? Why did I swim so far from her? according to my account. "In reality," he writes, "you *did* stay close to her and struck her over the head with your fist and let her drown." And that I didn't expect the bruise would be discovered because of her thick hair. That shows to what lengths a foul, diseased imagination can go! The fact is I was floating on my back, and Angela swam away from me, not purposely, but pursuing her own way, until she was dangerously far from me. I called her, but got no reply and must have swum in the wrong direction. The tide was on the ebb and we must have been carried out further than I expected. She must have got a cramp, and it was then she cried out so horribly—like that! No *not* like that! Curse that creature whatever it may be! As for the bruise, the body was not recovered for twelve hours, and some flotsam must have struck her during that time. I shan't deal with any more of the vicious brute's insinuations in this diary. I find doing so troubles me and racks my nerves, and these sleepless nights are wearing me down. I keep looking up furtively to see if there's anyone in the room. There comes that devilish cry again; cotton wool does *no* good. I am going out now to kill that bird. I can stand it no more.

Later. No luck! There was some moonlight, but I could see nothing. Yet the cry came both as I was going out and returning. The pool looked very sinister and forbidding. I can understand, in a way, how it might lure a suicide to his doom. It even exerts a certain perverse attraction over me. It works on that *phobia* of mine. It is often, too often, in my thoughts. I am half-drunk again, utterly exhausted, and may sleep for once.

Oct. 8th: The rowboat came this morning and was launched on the lake. I rowed out into the middle with a leaded line, but, oddly enough, I couldn't find bottom. There seems to be some sort of current which swings the line. I don't think any pole would be long enough. It doesn't matter, but I'd like to have shown old Carlman, who I spotted peering at me through the trees. What a superstitious old fool he is! In the afternoon I tried some fishing, and

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again with no luck at all. There was not a breath of wind and the pool lay black, thick, a lake of oil, it seemed. I gave my float a lot of line and at once it received a tremendous tug which almost jerked the rod from my hand and started the reel screaming. Then the line went slack, and on reeling in, found it had been snapped well above the float. This seemed very queer and I tried once more, with the same startling result. It must be, I suppose, that the reeds grip it in some way, but I have known nothing like it in a long piscatorial experience. It does seem to be true about the birds. After landing I carefully searched the trees, but didn't see or start a wing.

YET what is that cry I hear? There it comes again. I have definitely come to the conclusion that the lake is a very strange place, almost, it seems, with laws of its own. Nothing seems quite normal about it. I shall keep away from it as much as I can. I'm sorry I wasted money on that boat, it was impulsive and heedless.

Oct. 10th: Barratt came to me this morning. I could tell by his face something was wrong. I haven't liked the look of him for some time. He had the impudence to say he could no longer keep silent about that *other* matter. It was too much on his conscience. His conscience! He should acquire a brain first. I swore to him, almost desperately, that it had been a pure accident, that Angela must have somehow switched on the gas as she was undressing. He said truculently that that might be so, but the authorities should be told; that they'd left the verdict "open" to see if any more evidence came out, and this should be made known. The ignorance and insolence of the man! I can see he hates me in his heart. We argued for over an hour, and at last I said, "Why this sudden change of mind? I've paid you well. You promised to keep your mouth shut. Why this new resolve?" At first he wouldn't say, but at last he blurted out, "It's that screaming every night. It's the voice of the Missus. And I feel her about, too, and she wants the truth known." I pretended to laugh heartily at this, and told him it was just a bird at the pool. "I've seen it," I said, "and tried to shoot it!" He appeared unconvinced; so I went on, "Come to the lake tonight and I'll show it to you. Will *that* satisfy you?" "If you show me the thing that makes that cry, sir, I'll think it over," he replied. "Otherwise I'll have to tell what I know."

"Remember," I said, "if you do that wicked, stupid act, I'll sack you without a character and say you tried to blackmail me, and good jobs aren't so easy to come by for men of your age."

"Never mind about that," he replied with effrontery, "you show me the bird which screams like a drowning woman!" And he went on his way. I'm writing this in great agitation. I've burnt my boats. I shall have to fool him now. I daren't let him tell of that incident. It was a pure accident, and if Angela had let me share her room it would never have happened. It would mean reopening the whole thing and I cannot face it. I daren't, especially as the doctor who attended Angela was very "sticky" about it at the time, and his evidence would be dangerous. I can stand no more persecution. I must use my wits tonight.

Later. A terrible thing has happened—Barratt was drowned at the pool! It was a pure accident. We went there together at ten o'clock, as arranged. It was dark except for starlight. As we approached, that cry came, but it was *no nearer*. I was terrified lest Barratt should realize this. As it was, he hesitated. I put my hand on his shoulder and found he was trembling violently. "Don't be a coward!" I whispered, "That is the bird. I'll show it to you. Keep quiet and move stealthily." I led the way till we reached the tree barrier and, moving a branch, peered through. Then I whispered again to Barratt. "Come up beside me and try to follow the direction of my arm." He did so and I said, "There, man, on the shore, can't you see it!" In his eagerness he moved still further forward. The bank was damp, he seemed to slip, and the next moment he was in. There was a splash but no other sound. It was a *pure accident!*

I dashed round to the boat and searched

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the spot, but could find nothing. And then, heaven be my witness, I saw a wave moving across the face of the water. It swung the boat high and broke on the further shore. And that fearful cry came and its echo screamed in my head. What to do now? It was an accident, but dare I tell the truth after all that has happened? No, I dare not. I must plan otherwise. Luckily Barratt has no relatives alive, no friends, I fancy; no one will enquire after him. I must impersonate him for a week till his body comes up, and then I must dispose of it. I'll weight it heavily and sink it again for ever. Then I'll take the car and drive up to town very late at night, tell the agent I found the place too lonely and unsuitable, and tell him to put it on the market. Then I'll go abroad—the Argentine, which I know well, and have all my funds transferred there. I'll burn Barratt's trunk and all his clothes save one suit and his cap. Luckily he was about my height and not too unlike me in build and appearance. I swear to God it was an accident!

This has shattered my nerves. I thought I *saw* Angela just now, standing by the door in her shroud, her eyes hard on me. Just an illusion. I've been drinking too much, that is it. I'm near drunk now. My one longing is to leave this hellish place. There is that cry again! I must stick it out this week, drunk or sober, and then my troubles will be over.

Oct. 11th: All went well. I rose early and dressed in Barratt's suit and cap, which I pulled down over my eyes. I knew him so long I can imitate his walk and even his voice. I took a short stroll in the garden to show myself, and when the milkman came, I waved to him from a distance. There will be the butcher tomorrow and I shall just say, "Nothing this week," through the door.

Then I changed into my own clothes and carefully surveyed the pool just in case. I have prepared some weighted ropes and will bury them near the pool tomorrow. I searched it again in the evening just before dark. It is very strange and inexplicable, but it seems to have changed color. It is now a sinister, sullen carmine in hue, so that it resembles a lake of blood, and it is continually disturbed by a huge ripple which passes across it. I noticed old Carlman kept out of my way. I don't know why, but it was quite obvious. I mistrust this. I shall have a hard struggle to fight myself through this week. Every time I doze off I wake from hideous dreams. I have to drink to keep sane. Thought I saw Barratt in his pantry when I was getting my supper. I keep fancying I see Angela—keep glancing up. The day seems endless.

Oct. 14th: All goes well. My impersonation of Barratt has worked perfectly. Tradespeople not calling again. Old Carlman still avoids me, that is all that worries me, during the *day*, but, O God, the evening and the night! The body should reappear Sunday, but I am keeping the closest watch. I shall spend all day on the lake on Sunday pretending to fish. How fortunate it is so hemmed in; little chance of being overlooked while I'm doing the job. There'll be a risk, of course, but, by God, I'm hardened to those by now! The pool is still that horrid hue and is continually disturbed, ever restless and reeking—yes, it stinks! Wants rain to freshen it. I shan't write in the diary again till it is over. The trembling and sweating of my hand makes it almost impossible. Oh, these fearful, endless days! Sometimes I have to force my lips together with my hand lest I start to scream, and if I started, I could never stop. Am as far gone as that! Only four days to wait, only four. Supposing it doesn't reappear! I dare not think of that. That cry again, that death cry. Angela is standing by the door.

Oct. 19th: What can have happened? When I looked out of my bedroom window at dawn this morning, I could see a number of people moving towards the pool and breaking down the wire fence. I hurried out to them and bade them be gone, threatened to prosecute every one of them. They took not the slightest notice of me, completely ignored me, simply looked through me, and continued to pour through the gap. They even shouldered me brutally aside when I tried to dispute their passage. Even old Carlman forced his way past me, his

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eyes, like theirs, rapt and staring. They are like devotees obsessed and absorbed in some rite and drilled in its enactment. I saw not one speak or smile, and each took up his place on the bank till the pool was entirely surrounded, and then they fixed their eyes on the water. I know why they are there! I cursed and raved at them, but they had not ears for me.

So I came back to the house and am watching from the window. How did they know! How could they have known! It is deadly still and I could hear any sound they make, but they make no sound. What shall I do? Angela and Barratt are here in the room with me. Speak! Speak, you dead and absolve me! So it has come to this. Water! Water! As was prophesied. Shall I get the police? Shall I take the car and fly? What will they do when——I shall swear to them Barratt fell in. I'll defend myself to the last. I did my best to save him. How much longer to wait? Shall I—? Hark! Hark! A great and dreadful shout comes from them! He has risen! I know it! Father! Father!

(On December 16th, 1921, James Greville Leas was hanged for the murder of his servant, George William Barratt, at Reading Jail.)

Pattern

by Dorothy Quick

THE child was weaving
A strange and terrible pattern,
Beyond his conceiving
In the stark room of a slattern.

His eyes never strayed
From the taut web of his making;
He was not dismayed
Though his little hands were shaking.

Yet he kept weaving
The dark and horrible design;
He had no believing,
But the silken skeins were thin and fine.

The child was tired,
Yet his fingers flew fast as birds;
His cheeks were fired.
Still his trembling lips spoke no words.

"What are you weaving?"
A stranger asked with quickened breath.
Without deceiving
The child replied: "I weave my death."

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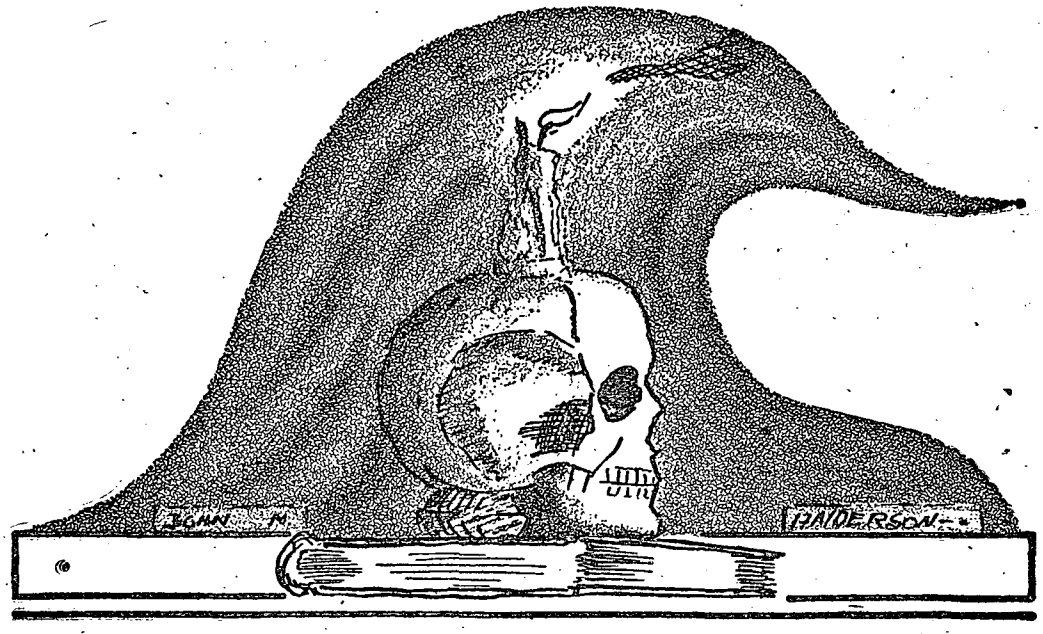
It would be a push-over . . . everybody has something *to hide.*



Gordona's Skull

By Mary Elizabeth Counselman

JOE "FRESNO" TALLEY dropped his cigarette butt on the sidewalk and ground it out with his foot, careful not to step on it where the hole had worn through his shoesole. Absently he felt in the pocket of his shabby trousers, before remembering. No more cigarettes; that last one had been picked up out of the gutter, in front of a theatre whose twinkling marquee had once spelled out his name in lights a foot high. . . .

Fresno snarled deep in his throat. So what if he had taken a couple too many that night in Pittsburgh, when he was playing at the Roxy? So he had muffed a card sleight, dropping the whole pack all over the stage, then fallen flat on his face trying to pick them up. Was that a crime? Was that any reason for his booking agent to be dodging him now, after telling him that seven cancellations in a row meant a magician was washed up? He'd show that crumb!

Digging a half-empty flask of cheap whiskey from his hip pocket, Fresno finished it at a gulp and shied the empty bottle at a scrawny gray cat, hunting for scraps in a nearby trashcan. The cat yowled and scampered out of range, limping. Fresno laughed nasally. Nothing wrong

Heading by John N. Anderson

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with him; his hands didn't shake too much, or he couldn't have hit that mangey old. . . .

Shivering suddenly as the chill night wind cut through his loud striped shirt, he paused before a rickety old tenement where his aimlessly wandering feet had taken him. A sign beside the door read:

PROF. CORDONA
SPIRITUALIST
FREE SEANCE NIGHTLY
PRIVATE CONSULTATION,
$2.00 (plus tax)

Fresno grinned at that last. Cripes! Were they even taxing the ghosts these days? His close-set hard little eyes, like two chips of onyx, slid over the sign thoughtfully, in a face that might have belonged to a race track tout or a smalltime racketeer. But he was no vag! Fresno drew himself up angrily, cursing under his breath as a passerby shoved a dime into his hand—but keeping the money. Crumbs, all of 'em! He'd show 'em! In the meantime, though, he was "at liberty", it was getting on toward three years since he had done a show and cashed a fat check, and a guy had to eat, didn't he? He couldn't sleep on a park bench, not in this weather.

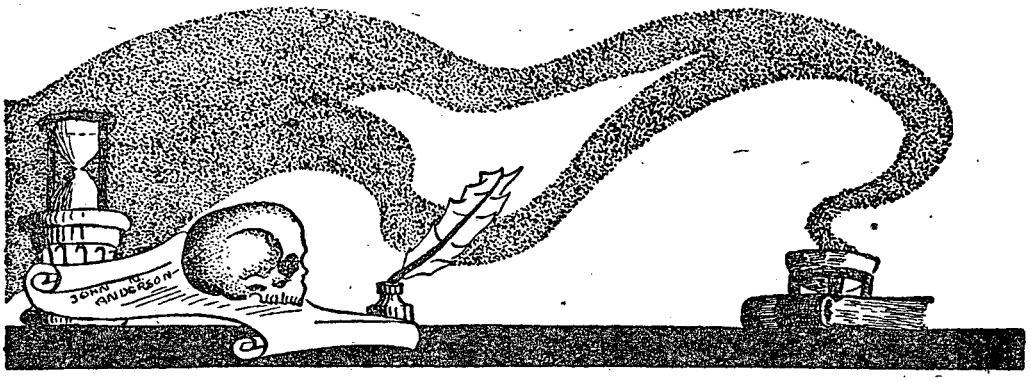
Looking narrowly at the spiritualist's sign, he had an idea all at once how he could maybe latch onto a few bucks. These fake mediums were always on the dodge, even if they were operating with a fortune-teller's license. This "Prof. Cordona," whoever he was—it might be easy to shake him down for a little cash by threatening to explain his gimmicks to some of his best customers. The usual tricks, of course. No spook show operated without them, and any professional magician knew how they worked; floating hands, spirit-voices speaking through a trumpet also floating in the air, ghostly raps and knocks all over the seance room, and now and then a misty face appearing in a smoky whirl of "ectoplasm." Anybody with a strong flashlight could banish the semi-darkness of such a seance and reveal the black threads tying these "materializations" to a moving boom that, with the lights on, became part of the picture molding. They always held hands at these little get-togethers, with the medium in the ring along with the "seekers"—so they thought.

Oh, yes . . . Fresno mounted the stone steps quickly. This was going to be a push-over!

The Professor's tiny flat turned out to be on the fifth floor. Panting from his climb up the spiraling staircase, Fresno paused for a moment before the door designated by another sign: PROF. CORDONA, SPIRITUALIST. Then he turned the knob and entered quietly, first through the doorway, then through a heavy worn-velvet drape that shut out the light from the hall.

Groping his way, Fresno waited to let his eyes become accustomed to the half-darkness, like that in a second-rate movie theatre, then slid into the nearest chair of three rows lined up facing a small dais.

The seance was in full swing. Spirits



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were knocking obligingly on walls and floors. In a small curtained cabinet on the platform, they were also ringing bells and twirling a penny noise-maker such as revelers use at a New Year's celebration. A luminous hand drifted overhead, swooping abruptly to touch a squealing woman in the audience with icy-cold fingers chilled from Outer Space—or from the freezer compartment of the Professor's refrigerator, Fresno reminded himself. They'd keep these stuffed gloves there when not in use. He leaned back, smiling contemptuously at the small audience of perhaps eighteen people, who had come up here and would later make a "small donation" for the privilege of being rooked.

The medium, Fresno saw, was seated on the dais in a comfortable armchair, his head thrown back in the customary trance. Professor Cordona was an old man, he perceived, with the flowing white hair of an ex-thespian, probably an old Shakespearean actor who had, long since, fallen upon evil days. He was a good imitator, Fresno admitted grudgingly; good enough for bit-parts in radio, if he had sense enough to push it. The spirit-voices that issued from his throat were now those of a lisping child, now the heavily accented voice of an Italian emigrant, now the mellow throaty tones of a Southern Negro. The old codger was clever, too. He had dug up bits of personal fact about those in his audience, which, offered in the voice of some dear departed relative, often left one or another of them gasping.

For the newcomers he gave what is called a "cold reading"—incidents about their past and present that might have happened to anyone, but which they were quiveringly certain had happened to them alone. Then, with a sigh and a shudder, Cordona came out of his trance, and said in a mild pleasant voice that he hoped there were manifestations and that everyone was pleased.

As a *piece de resistance,* the old medium stepped over to a handsome buhl cabinet in one corner. From it, with an almost tender gesture, he lifted out a skull, a human skull.

Fresno's eyes narrowed. He had seen talking skulls before, usually made of plastic and mounted on a gimmicked tray. But this one, he saw with a tiny shiver of revulsion, seemed to be a real skull, yellowed with age and slightly cracked. As Cordona moved closer to his audience, stepping casually among them with the grisly thing held in his palms like a basketball, the magician noted that two teeth were missing from the articulated lower jaw. There was also a neat little hole, like a bullet hole, in the back of the polished cranium. Fresno grinned wolfishly at this chilling bit of realism, which the old man could have bored into the bone with a wood drill.

He leaned forward, listening intently to the Professor's spiel—something about this being the skull of a man who had died violently, from a shot in the back, and thus could not shuffle off this mortal coil with the ease of those fortunate human beings who had died peacefully in bed. The spirit of the man, the mind, the intelligence, call it what you will, (Cordona was saying in the rolling syllables of an old-time ham-actor) still haunted its earthly shell, returning to it like a homing pigeon seeking its nest. But, as a disembodied spirit, it now knew many things that, in life, it could not know. Having no vocal cords, it could not speak—but, by the strange psychic phenomenon known as *telekinesis,* it could move the skull's jaw and answer any question that might be asked. One click for *yes!* Two clicks— *no!* It could also spell or convey messages by means of the Morse Code.

Fresno crouched forward in his chair, watching the performance rather jealously. This old coot was good; better than he had ever been in his heyday, and it annoyed the ex-magician to see such talent and stage presence wasted on a spook show in a walk-up tenement apartment. There was, too, a kindly serenity about Cordona that irritated him. Why, twice already he had muffed a chance to con one of his customers into coming back for more. The spirit-answers he gave them—via the weirdly clicking jaw of the skull between his palms—were simple and friendly, almost

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fatherly. Indeed, he seemed (Fresno's lip curled) more interested in helping these ignorant goggle-eyed jaspers than in skillfully extracting an extra dollar or two from their meagre bankrolls. Why, with a racket like this, the magician thought impatiently, he himself would be in the chips! Maybe, if the theatrical agents continued to dodge him, he might start one of these spook-shows himself, if he could talk some hard-faced, tight-fisted landlady out of her rent-in-advance.

THE Professor was strolling among the audience now, relaying question after question to the skull—which answered promptly by snapping its grinning teeth like a hungry crocodile. As he passed close to Fresno, the magician fidgetted uncomfortably, staring at the hollow cavernous eyes of the bony thing, which seemed to be staring back at him. A gimmick, just a gimmick, he reminded himself firmly. But —why did this amiable old fraud, Cordona, have to use a real skull? A skull—which had once been the living frame for a man's head!

"Does my sweetheart love me?" one giggling young girl whispered self-consciously as the medium bent over her.

The skull snapped its jaw, almost merrily. *Yes!* it clicked. *Yes! Yes!* The girl sighed happily, and Cordona passed on, leaning to catch another whispered question.

Then—Fresno sat up, stiffly. The white-haired medium, instead of holding the skull between his palms as before, was now gently handing it to a man who had asked a question. Grinning, gingerly, taking the gruesome thing in his hands the man repeated his query. He wanted to know what had become of a two-carat diamond, which had fallen out of his wife's engagement ring?

The skull was silent for a moment, an uncanny moment, as though it were thinking the matter over. Then the grinning jaw clicked several itmes, spelling out a word. D-R- *Drain,* the word was. The man gasped.

"Why, sure!" he burst out excitedly. "She was washing dishes just before she noticed it was gone. I'll get a plumber to take those pipes apart tomorrow. It may still be in there, clogged up in some grease—"

A murmur of approval ran over the small crowd, and Fresno's lips twitched with ironic amusement at the old medium's clever guesswork. Housewives were forever losing rings and small bits of jewelry down the kitchen sink. But—the magician frowned. That skull was quite a gadget. The only ones he had ever seen, in magic shops over the country, worked with a silk thread, or some sort of mechanism in the tray on which it was mounted. His scalp prickled slightly as he watched the Professor hand the weird object to yet another person—for whom the toothy jaws clicked again obligingly, although Cordona was standing some feet away.

At last, retrieving his talking skull, the old man bowed politely to his wide-eyed "seekers," announced that the seance was over, and invited them all to come back again tomorrow for further contact with the Beyond. Chattering, giggling, and squealing, the audience filed out, each dropping a small coin in a cigar box placed near the door for "donations."

UNNOTICED in the half-light, Fresno Talley sat where he was, smiling thinly as the old man shut the door, then counted out the money in the cigar box—$4.45. He sighed, then gave a humorous little shrug, and plodded toward the closed door of what must have been his bedroom, starting slightly as he saw Fresno lounging in one of the chairs.

"Oh! I didn't see you, young man," the Professor said pleasantly. "Did you wish a private consultation? Ouija board, perhaps? I find that the most satisfactory method, if there is a question you do not wish even me to hear—"

Fresno's short laugh cut him off. He rose to his feet and stuck out his hand, turning on all the charm that eight years of successfully warming up a cold audience had taught him.

"Relax, Pop!" he drawled. "I'm Joe Talley—the Great Taliaferro. Maybe you've

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caught my act at the Ritz? I—four years ago, I knocked 'em in the aisles with a new vanish called The Human Fishbowl. Say! That skull gimmick of yours is a honey! I can't figure how it works—except that it's *not* by telekinesis! Psychic force!" the magician snorted.

Professor Cordona peered at him keenly out of mild dreamy-blue eyes like a pair of moonstones. He smiled abruptly and seized the younger man's hand.

"Taliaferro!" he greeted warmly. "Of course! I did attend one of your performances—in Chicago, it was, at the Trianon. That Fishbowl vanish was indeed mystifying. But I particularly enjoyed your sleight-of-hand. . . ." He glanced down at the long pale fingers gripping his, and appeared not to notice their alcoholic tremor. "Ah, yes! Yes, indeed! I am greatly honored to have you attend my poor performance, here in my little cubbyhole under the roof!"

"Thanks. But—the skull?" Fresno prodded. "What's the gimmick? I noticed it even works when you're ten feet away. Built-in clockworks, maybe? You time the questions to fit the answers?"

The old medium glanced down at the grisly object, still held casually in his hand like a piece of bric-á-brac. He held it up, turning it this way and that so the other could peer into the hollow eyes, the gaping nose-hole. He chuckled, patting the skull almost fondly, and handing it to Fresno, who took it with no relish whatever.

"Oh—Yorick?" the old medium chuckled. "No, there's nothing supernatural about him, I assure you. He's an old friend! A prop that I have kept, out of sheer sentimentality, from my old days with the Sock and Buskin Players." His blue eyes softened in wistful reminiscence as he prattled on about the past, as always with the old and lonely. "My wife, Anna, was rather fond of him, too—she played Ophelia to my Hamlet, you understand, until——" The Professor sighed gently. "Drafty theatres. Late hours. Poor diet, you know. It was during the influenza epidemic of 1918 that I lost her. Our boy, too," he murmured, then eyed Fresno shyly. "We had a son, aged twelve when he died. Quite a magic fan, that youngster! Would you believe it," the old man added proudly, "he could palm eight billiard balls, four to a hand! At the age of twelve, mind you!"

"No kidding?" Fresno exclaimed in the right tone of admiration, his black eyes sliding speculatively over the seance room. "That's sure unusual, for a kid! Hands too small—" His eyes came back to the skull in his own hand, examining it for hidden mechanisms. "Yorick, huh?" he laughed. "From the grave-digger scene—if I remember my Hamlet from high school. Where the guy picks up a skull and says: *'Alas, poor Yorick' . . .?"*

"*'. . . I knew* him, *Horatio!'*" the old actor continued the quotation, beaming at his guest. "*'A fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy. He hath borne me on his back a thousand times, and now—how abhorred in my imagination it is! My gorge rises at it. . . .'*"

"You can say *that* again!" Fresno muttered, grimacing with distaste as he turned the skull to face him again. "This is no prop, is it? It's the real McCoy?"

"Oh yes. Yorick was once—someone's head," Cordona looked amused at the other's expression. "I often wonder how he got that bullet hole. He was bought from a medical supply company for me by a young dentist in the audience at one of my performances—when the papier-maché skull we had always used rather embarrassingly folded up in my hands during the grave scene! *'Here hung those lips that I have kissed—I know not how oft!'*" he quoted again, smiling at the skull as at some beloved dog or cat. "*'Where be your gibes now, your gambols, your songs, your flashes of merriment that were wont to set the table on a roar? Not one now to mock your own grinning. . . .'* Eh, Yorick?"

In Fresno's hands, the skull clicked its grim jaw once—*yes!*—in ironic answer. The magician almost dropped it and lost no time in setting it down on a nearby table, where the cavernous eyes stared up at him sardonically.

"That damn thing!" he laughed shakily. "How *does* it work, Pop?"

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"By electro-magnetic power," the old medium confided, pleased at the magician's bewilderment. "There's a coil in my kitchenette back there. It sets up a magnetic field for about twenty-five feet. There are several keys under the floorboards in this room—a young electrician rigged it up for me. Grateful because I—well, persuaded his wife to come back to him. Speaking, of course, through the spirit of her mother, whose face I managed to materialize in a cloud of ectoplasm one night!"

The old man's eyes twinkled with naughtiness, like a child on Hallowe'en peering through the eyeholes of a dough-face. Fresno licked his thin lips.

"Say!" he drawled. "You've got a sweet little set-up here, Pop. You could take these suckers for plenty."

Instantly the Professor's eyes went cold. He looked at the younger man levelly, and spoke in a flat tone of finality.

"Yes—I am well aware of that, Mr. Talley. There are a great many fake mediums in this country who prey upon the grief and loneliness of ignorant people who have lost loved ones. I consider this the most vicious form of crime, worse than murder or kidnapping, and am always quick to expose such a person to the police whenever I happen upon his activities. My own little seances," the old man added quietly, "are—entertainment, at worst; friendly counsel, at best. I have never extorted money from those who—" he smiled slightly "—like to pretend with me that I am not merely an old humbug—like the Wizard of Oz. Those who come here to my seances are troubled people, reaching out for something, some small measure of comfort to cling to until they are able to face their problems with courage and common sense. Do I make myself clear?"

The mild blue eyes bored into Fresno's face, trying to read what lay behind his impassive expression. But the magician laughed quickly, on a note of reproach.

"Oh, *sure,* Pop! Why, anybody would be a *heel* to take advantage of dopes like come here, wanting to ask their dead grandma what to do with the egg money! Gee! You didn't think I meant—?"

Cordona relaxed, smiling warmly again. "No. No, of course I didn't. You know," he said shyly, "my—my son would have been just about your age, if he had lived. And probably a famous stage magician, like yourself. I don't suppose," he added diffidently, "that you would do me the honor of dining with me here? I was about to make some Italian spaghetti, by a very special recipe given me by the good landlady of this tenement. Would you?"

"Would I!" Fresno accepted heartily, thinking of the cold night outside and the prospect of no supper at all, though he disliked parmesan. "Say, this is swell of you, Pop! Tell you the truth, I'm not working just now," he confessed what was obvious to the old medium at a glance. "But I'm rigging a new act that'll wow 'em. Ghost-show. They sell better than straight magic, because every school kid knows how to saw a woman in half nowadays! Mind if I hang around here a few days to get some pointers?"

The old medium's face glowed with genuine pleasure. "I would be delighted, my boy!" he said, then added wistfully, "I —I have always been just a bit lonely, since Anna and our boy passed on. Then, too, mine is not a profession conducive to neighborly visiting!" he laughed. "Even the cleaning woman is mortally terrified of poor Yorick, and absolutely refuses to dust around his cabinet. She insists that he *watches* her!"

"Yeah—" Fresno glanced uncomfortably at the skull on the table, privately agreeing with that unknown lady; those hollow eyes *did* seem to follow one about the room. "Well," he said, turning on the charm and slapping Cordona on the back, "anyhow we can have ourselves some fun for a few days, Pop! Maybe," he let his voice fall an octave, "maybe I could kinda pinch-hit for that boy of yours, who wanted to grow up and be a magician? I—I never knew my own dad; he ran away and deserted Ma when I was born," the magician lied dramatically. "Think you could—sort of adopt me as a son for a few days?" he asked tremulously.

The white-haired medium, dreaming of

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the past, nodded, pathetically, eager, his eyes misting sentimentally.

"Why—of course, my boy. Of course! Stay as long as you like!"

Fresno sighed, putting on his act for all it was worth. But as he moved toward the bedroom, the skull on the table clicked its jaw twice, emphatically, as—the magician reminded himself nervously—he must have stepped on one of the concealed switches under the floor.

The skull said *No!*

FRESNO stayed for three days, his onyx eyes prizing out every secret in the tiny three-room apartment. At the end of three days, having discovered how everything worked, including the hinged jaw of "Yorick," the skull, he was about to shake the old medium down for the rent money he discovered hidden in a coffee can in the kitchenette.

But that night Professor Cordona had a stroke. When the neighborhood doctor had finished examining him, he took Fresno aside, pulling at his lower lip and regarding the young man keenly.

"You a relative?"

The magician shook his head, shrugging. "Business acquaintance." He yawned. "The old guy bad off?"

"Very bad," the physician nodded. "But he'll recover. What he needs is a month's rest in bed, and somebody to nurse him. Of course," he muttered as though thinking aloud, "I could move him to the hospital, charity ward. But he's a proud old rascal—might upset him."

As he spoke, Fresno Talley's quick weasel-mind was running over the situation, adding and subtracting. There were only about thirty-five dollars in that coffee can. Chicken feed! Buttons—compared to what he could get if he were allowed to run the Professor's seance for a few weeks, by his own methods! His blank face changed swiftly under the doctor's eyes, taking on a sad noble expression.

"Now, look!" Fresno snapped. "No charity ward for my pal! I'm just about as broke as he is, but I can sure stay here and look after him!"

The doctor relaxed. "Splendid, splendid!" he said, glancing at his watch impatiently. "Well—there's not much to do for the old fellow. Keep him off his feet, and don't let him get excited about anything. I'll send up a prescription—" He scribbled on a pad, glanced at his watch again, and hurried out, waving away the fee Fresno offered him. "Later. Back tomorrow."

Cordona was pleased and pitifully grateful. Lying in the big brass bed in the other room, he smiled to himself gently as he listened to his guest bustling about in the kitchenette, or in the living room, preparing for the night's seance. *Like a son! Just like Paul, if he had lived,* the old man thought fondly. He wished he could listen in on the seance that night, to see how Fresno handled it, but the doctor had advised against that. So, propped up on pillows, with a magazine in his hand, the old medium dozed and rested.

Beyond the door, seated on the dais, Fresno Talley, ex-magician, was hard at work. The Professor's audience, he observed with satisfaction, seemed to take to him at once, probably because they heard he was taking care of the old man in his illness. It was easy, absurdly easy—Fresno grinned scornfully—to con these suckers into coming back, night after night, leaving larger and larger donations in the cigar box by the door.

The landlady, he discovered—by the simple process of flattering her and buying her a ten-cent bunch of violets—knew everything about everyone in the community. She liked to gossip, and it was this gossip, skillfully concealed and paid out like fishing-line, that Fresno had his spirits reveal every night. The Professor's gimmicks were absurdly easy to work, especially Yorick, the skull. There were, Fresno learned, seven keys to the electro-magnet, placed in strategic positions all over the room. And it was the clicking jaw that mystified his audience most of all, since it answered questions while held in their own hands.

On the third night after the old medium became ill, the magician tried his

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first trick. One of the materialized faces, floating above one trembling gentleman, suddenly mentioned a name—and the man's face, even in the semi-darkness, turned scarlet with embarrassment. Jumping up hastily, he almost ran out of the Professor's apartment.

And Fresno laughed nasally, jotting down the man's name and address in a little notebook he had begun to carry on his person. That gentleman, a smalltime grocer in the neighborhood, would be good for a couple of hundred bucks—to be used as hush-money for that spirit which had mentioned his paramour's name!

Oh, it was a push-over! Everybody, Fresno told himself cynically, had something to hide. A shady business deal. A secret love-affair. An injury to someone, either planned or already perpetrated. People were only human—but now and then they were willing to pay through the nose to keep it quiet! Blackmail—? Oh, sure. But the sweet part of it was, the old man, Cordona, would get all the kick-back. If any of these suckers in Fresno's carefully kept little notebook got mad and squawked to the cops, it was the Professor who would go to jail—not Fresno Talley, who, he would insist, was only doing what the old man told him in conducting the seances for his sick friend.

The Professor was sublimely ignorant of what was going on behind his bedroom door. He had even, Fresno noted with impatience, developed a deep fondness for his guest and "benefactor." In the afternoons, while he sat on the edge of the old medium's bed, playing two-handed Canasta, he often noticed how the mild blue eyes watched his face, seeing in it the contours of his dead son.

On one of these afternoons, with the rain drumming on the tenement roof just overhead, the old man smiled at Fresno, and reached out shyly to touch his hand.

"My boy," Cordona faltered. "I—I can't lie to you any longer. You have been much too kind to me, too thoughtful—staying here, running my seances for me, caring for me like—like my own son. When there is no need."

The magician peered at him sharply, his long fingers poised above a card he was about to palm. "No—no need? I don't get you."

"I mean," the old man said gently, "that I could have paid well for medical aid at some hospital. I—I have nearly ten thousand dollars in the bank, which I have saved up over a long period of years. It's—it's simply that I prefer to live among these less fortunate people, in this tiny flat. Now and then I—I have helped many of them, with money from an 'unknown source' as promised by one of my fake spirits. It is my kind of charity."

"What!" Fresno's eyes narrowed with shock, then softened under the old man's clear gaze. "Why, you old rascal!" he laughed heartily. "Playing ghost Santa Claus all year to a bunch of poor dopes who never dream it was you and not the spirits that helped them?"

Cordona chuckled complacently. "That," he said, "is most aptly put. But," he added, "I have a rather considerable balance. And if you will be so kind as to call a young lawyer in this neighborhood, a Mr. Peabody, I should like to draw up my will—and leave that balance to you."

The magician's mouth fell ajar. He had the grace to flush slightly. Then avarice and a naturally deceitful nature got the better of his momentary impulse, and he went into his act again. He protested. He hung his head, saying the old man was much too good to him. But, in the end, he accepted the legacy—and got hold of Lawyer Peabody as quickly as he could.

He had already decided what to do, a few days later.

THAT night, much to Fresno's annoyance, the doctor said Professor Cordona might sit up and observe the seance, if not conduct it. Wrapped in a blanket, the old man had to be carried into the seance room and settled in a comfortable morris chair before the magician could begin his act. He was furious at this denouement, because there was a very juicy sucker attending tonight, whom he could probably have nicked for a cool thousand. But

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with Cordona listening in, he was afraid to pull any fasties. The old man was simple and kindly, but he was by no means stupid.

Which was why Fresno had decided to murder him, by the simple process of exciting him unduly, the day after he himself had collected all the blackmail he could rake together from the suckers in his little notebook. Dead, the old man could not even defend himself. And dead, he was worth ten thousand bucks more to his adopted son!

At nine o'clock the little seance room had filled up. Due to Fresno's showmanship—and a few hints by telephone to several perspiring people who had attended other meetings—he had to put in another row of chairs, borrowed from the landlady. The audience was unusually quiet, a strained uneasy quiet that struck the Professor at once, bundled up in his morris chair beside a window overlooking the alley five stories below. He wondered at this change in his "seekers," and was about to ask Fresno concerning it, when the ex-magician mounted the dais and sat down in the chair, prepared to go into his customary trance.

Cordona watched and listened, smiling. Fresno Talley did not possess as many voices as he himself did, he realized modestly, nor did his quick, slightly harsh tones spellbind the audience as easily as his own rolling Shakespearean accents. But the seance was creditable enough, the old man thought proudly—wishing his lost son into the person of this guest who had been so kind to him.

The luminous hand floated out over the audience as usual, eliciting screams and gasps from those it touched. The bells and noise-makers in the spirit-cabinet set up a merry din, and there were raps and knocks in every corner of the room. Then two faces materialized in a wad of ectoplasmic cheesecloth, carefully dipped in phosphorous. Someone recognized their lost daughter—although the face was a clipped-out picture of Shirley Temple. Someone else professed to see the features of an uncle in the photograph of a wanted criminal Fresno had clipped from a true detective magazine. Then, aping the Professor, he came out of his trance and turned on the blue light.

Striding over to the inlaid buhl cabinet, Fresno took out the skull, Yorick, eyeing it uncomfortably as always. He had never quite got used to the thing. Magic was magic, plastic horror gimmicks were one thing, a genuine human skull, obtained from a medical supply house, was something else again! Every time he got the thing out and looked at it, he began to wonder morbidly what the flesh features that covered this macabre framework had looked like. Some bum, no doubt. Some rumpot who had sold his body to science, in order to buy another quart. Then—well, maybe some other bum had put that bullet hole through his skull in order to steal the money. No one would ever know. There was, Fresno thought again, a sort of horrible anonymity about a skull—this one, Cordona's, his own, anybody's. Once there had been a thinking, feeling brain inside this hollow thing, but now——

Shuddering, Fresno got the object out of his hands as quickly as possible, handing it to a young veteran who wanted to know when he was going to get his G. I. insurance dividend. The skull, clacking its yellowed teeth hideously, spelled out: M-A-R-C-H. Fresno, of course, was tapping out the Morse Code letters where he stood near the dais, by stepping on one of the electro-magnet keys hidden under the floor. A second member of the audience took the skull between her hands, giggling nervously, and wanted to know whom she was going to marry. Yorick, obliging, spelled out the letters *J.C.*—a wide choice for the young lady, who suddenly whooped with mirth as she thought of someone with those initials.

Fresno, who was somehow unwilling to handle the skull any more than was absolutely necessary, let the grisly thing pass from hand to hand, clicking its answers again and again. Then, as the last person gave it back to him, the bony relic seemed suddenly to *twitch* between his palms. Sweat sprang out on his forehead and upper lip, and he almost dropped Yorick as the yellowed broken teeth began to click out letters in rapid Morse Code. Most of the

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audience, ex-Scouts in their childhood days, could make out the letters plainly.

B-L-A-C-K-M-A-I-L! the skull spelled. M-U-R-D-E-R!

Fresno set it down hurriedly on the table, swallowing on a dry throat. Then his eyes narrowed, glancing toward old Professor Cordona bundled up in his chair. But *he* couldn't be clicking out those sombre messages! He had not moved from his seat; was, in fact, leaning forward with a puzzled expression. The nearest electro-magnet key was two yards away from his slippered feet. Several members of the audience tittered, deciding that it was part of the act; a spirit-warning that actually meant nothing.

Perched on the table, and glowing weirdly in the blue light, Yorick was talking again. His grinning jaw clicked out the same message, spelling the words this time slowly by number in the alphabet, so that no one in the audience could miss their significance.

B-L-A-C-K-M-A-I-L! the skull said, emphatically. M-U-R-D-E-R!

Fresno Talley began to tremble all over. Casting his eyes all around the audience to single out someone, anyone, who might be working one of those hidden keys, he backed away from the skull. He mopped his forehead shakily, tugged at his collar.

And then he screamed, a high-pitched raucous yell, like a frightened horse. Because the skull, sitting there on its table, had *turned around*. It was staring straight at him with those holes of eyes, grinning at him sardonically with those bared teeth which suddenly began to click out that grim accusation again: B-L-A-C-K-M. . . .

Then, with a peculiar little hop, it rolled off the table. Rolled across the floor, with its teeth still snapping. Rolled straight toward Fresno Talley, who was screaming now hysterically and backing away in a mad scrambling rush—toward the window that looked down, five stories, upon a paved cluttered alley.

When the police arrived, and the ambulance picked up that broken body that had crashed through the fifth story window, a little knot of silent wide-eyed people moved closer, staring at Fresno's bloody remains, and at Professor Cordona. He had been carried down the long spiraling steps in order to identify the dead man. And now, as one of the policemen in charge handed him a small notebook, the officer growled:

"What's-zis? List o' names and addresses. . . ."

The old medium took one look at the names, and at the cryptic notations beside them. He paled. He was a kindly simple man, but he was by no means stupid.

"Oh, just—a list of my seekers," he said gently. "I always like to keep a record of the people most interested in—spiritualism, you understand, officer. My—my guest was keeping the list for me in my illness. It's of no importance."

As though to prove his statement, the old man tore out each page carefully, wadded them up, and tossed them into an ashcan—where a scrawny gray cat with a limp nosed them curiously, then arched his back to rub against the Professor's hand.

At that moment a young man in the crowd sidled over to Cordona, and nudged him. He was a happy-looking redhead in coveralls, with an electrician's tools bristling from every pocket.

"Well, Prof," he whispered, "I fixed that coil for you. Musta shorted out yesterday when you slipped out of bed to take a look at that skull. Funny! Mrs. Steinbaum says Yorick was working okay tonight at the seance, answerin' questions and everything, just before this guy tripped and fell out the window. Tough, huh?" The boy clucked his tongue as the ambulance pulled away. "Good friend of yours, wasn't he?"

Professor Cordona smiled oddly, glancing up at the window of his flat five stories above, where a cracked yellowed skull lay forgotten on the floor of the seance room.

"Not such a friend as Yorick," the old man said softly, then added whimsically, "You know—I often wish I'd known him when he was alive!"

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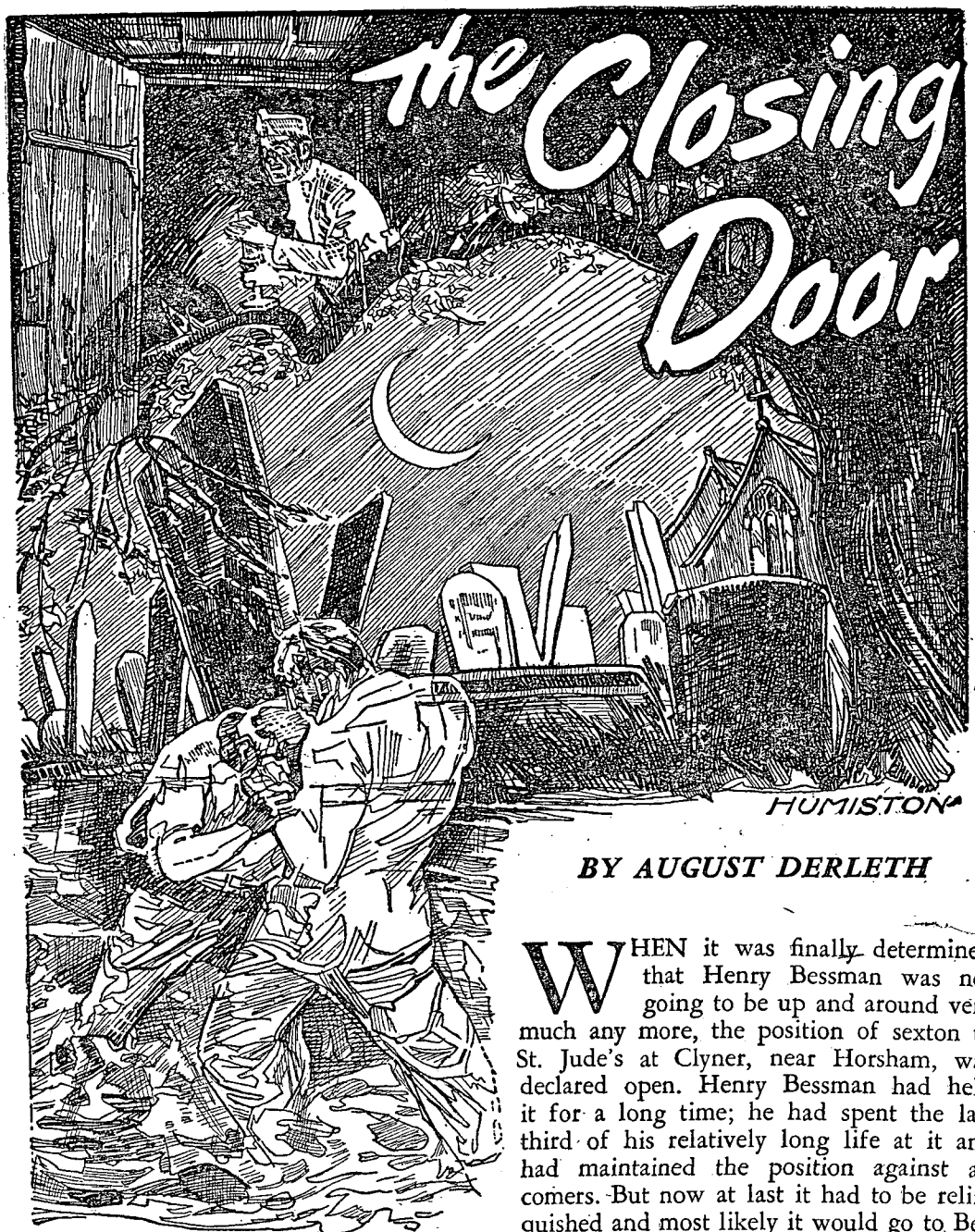

The Closing Door

After all, the advice was sound—always have the church cleaned up before dark. . . .

Heading by Fred Humiston

BY AUGUST DERLETH

WHEN it was finally determined that Henry Bessman was not going to be up and around very much any more, the position of sexton to St. Jude's at Clyner, near Horsham, was declared open. Henry Bessman had held it for a long time; he had spent the last third of his relatively long life at it and had maintained the position against all comers. But now at last it had to be relinquished and most likely it would go to Ben Thompson, who had hankered after it for years. Ben had been a thorn in Henry's side for a long while, but now it was time to look past all that. As soon as the vicar stopped by and told the sick man that the board had given the job to Ben Thompson, Henry sent for Ben.

Ben came in haste. Quarrel though they

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might have done for season after season, they were good enough friends underneath.

"Ain't worse, are you, Henry?" asked Ben, coming into the sick room.

"No, Ben. But I ain't long for this world, and that's a fact. Now you sit here a bit for I've a word to say to you and I don't want to tire me out. You've got the job."

"Yes, they gave it to me, Henry," admitted Ben, somewhat abashed now at his memory of how often he had attempted to wrest the position away from the incumbent.

"You always wanted it," said Henry placidly. "But it wasn't you put me out, and that's a fact. So I'm just as glad you got the job, Ben. Only, I've got a bit of advice for you, and I hope you take it."

"I'm listenin'."

"Try to get the church done before dark."

"You always got the church done before sundown," observed Ben.

"I made sure of it."

"Why?"

"Ah, it might be for no reason at all," answered Henry. "If it's reason you'll have, likely you'll find it. I did."

That was all Henry Bessman would say. Nevertheless, it was of a pattern with certain hints he was wont to throw out during his incumbency. "This ain't the job it looks to be," he used to say darkly. Or, "It's not for you, Ben; there's that in it that's not so nice." Ben had passed these hints over as suggesting difficulties with the vicar; perhaps Henry had not meant to impugn the vicar. It was a strange thing to tell him; Ben thought as he walked home.

Oddly enough, the vicar himself hinted the same thing next day; he put it differently by saying that he always liked to have the church closed and locked by sundown. The vicar was a short, rotund little man, who was disconcertingly absentminded; he habitually spoke in a vague, offhand manner, as if his real thoughts were far from the subject of conversation. One hesitated to interrupt him, and Ben did not.

It did not trouble Ben. Ben was a man of his own mind. He would do his work well, but at his own good time. He appreciated advice, but gave no promise of acting on it. Nevertheless, for a considerable time the church was cleaned and closed by sundown, and before there was any alteration in this practice Henry Bessman died and was buried, and the vicar removed to another parish, giving his place to the Reverend Kilvert McDonal, a tall, ascetic man of middle age who had a habit of frowning gravely and gazing down his nose at all and sundry who approached him.

So it was not for three months after Ben Thompson had been given those curious hints that he was delayed enough to have to finish cleaning the church after sundown. He had had to help dig a grave that afternoon, and it had upset his entire schedule, though Ben did not mind; he supposed the dead could be allowed this call upon the living for their last brief while.

ST. JUDE'S was a country parish church without pretensions, a simple building of stone, almost square, set just up on a small rise from the bank of a creek which at that place had been dammed up a little to form a carp pond. There was not much work to the cleaning of it. It had seventeen rows of pews, with one side aisle and one center aisle. There was a door at the end of the side aisle that led into a small passage giving outside to a path which led over to the vicarage in the one direction and down to the carp pond in the other direction.

It was this door that gave Ben Thompson trouble.

In all the times he had cleaned the church before, he had never had any difficulty with this door to the passage. He had opened it and shut it, he had left it stand ajar, he had cleaned it and waxed it, and never a jot of trouble had he had with it. But on this June evening, when he was late and in a hurry, the door was a vexation. He wanted it to stand open, but for some unaccountable reason it kept closing. Nor was there a breath of air to lay it to. He would go over, open the door, and walk away a little, when lo! the door would

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move silently away from the wall and swing to with a soft click.

It had never acted in this manner before, and Ben could not understand it. He was a phlegmatic, easy-going man, not easily disturbed, but readily enough annoyed, and the door soon became a source of annoyance, for he meant it to be open to let a little air through the church and also more light, since daylight was now rapidly fading, and the open front door was scarcely enough to light his way. He made one ineffectual attempt to block the door with one of the fragile chairs available, but the chair was not enough to hold the door; thereafter he made periodic trips to that end of the church and angrily opened the door again and again.

DURING this procedure, the sun went down, and the dusk gave way to early darkness. It was at that hour just between twilight and dark that Ben opened the door for the last time. A kind of glow lay in the water of the carp pond at the end of the walk beyond the church, like the spectre of day, and Ben stood briefly to gaze at it. Then he turned and walked back down the aisle, waiting for the click of the closing door to sound.

But before he heard it, he was impelled to turn and look back. What impelled him to do so he did not know; he was aware of a sudden inexplicable chill that struck his retreating back like a wash of cold air, and at the same moment an unnatural stillness seemed to close over the church. He turned and at that instant saw a curious tableau which had but a brief moment of life before it was lost in the shadows.

For the door was not closing of itself alone. It was being drawn shut by the hand of the vicar—or so at least Ben thought him to be, for he had the same build as the Reverend McDonal, and he walked in similar fashion. But Ben had no time to call out, for of a sudden a dark figure launched itself from the single little pew set beside the door to the passage and flung himself upon the vicar.

Ben dropped his broom and ran up the aisle to give aid to the vicar.

But the vicar was not there. No one was there.

Ben was shaken. He touched the doorknob and found it cold, colder than the June air. An aura of coldness clung to the door and the neighboring pew, quite as if someone from outside had come in. Ben was not too upset to ponder what he had seen. He *had* seen something, of that he was certain. Fancy, hallucination, illusion—these words meant nothing to him. He was stolid and sure of himself. He had seen something, which had the appearance of two men, one of them almost certainly the vicar. And, since he was settled in his mind about this, he locked up the church and went forthwith to call on the Reverend Kilvert McDonal.

The vicar was surprised in the midst of his meditations. If he were to be judged by appearances, he had not been out of the vicarage for some time.

"Ah, Mr. Thompson," he intoned, "you have finally finished at the church."

"That I have, Reverend."

The vicar leaned back and folded his hands as if in prayer. "What then, Mr. Thompson?"

Ben told him graphically.

The vicar murmured soothingly about the hallucinatory quality of the dusk. He explained the closing door by pointing out that very often pressure on the boards of a floor was quite sufficient to cause a door to swing shut; that it failed to happen during the day did not seem to him a point worth taking, for was there not after all a considerable difference in humidity between the night air and the day's, and was it not as well known that humidity affected the expansion and contraction of wood, thus lending variation to such purely material objects as doors and floors?

Ben listened soberly, but he was not entirely convinced. "Will you come and see for yourself tomorrow night, then?" he asked at last.

"If it will ease your mind, Mr. Thompson, I will do so."

"Agreed," said Ben and took his leave.

The vicar was not an unimaginative man. He returned to his meditations, but in a

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little while the sexton's story ate its way through his contemplation. By any standard, it was a queer little tale. It was not the kind of story Ben Thompson might have invented. Perhaps his predecessor had suggested it to him and Ben had then "seen" it.

At this moment, too, as he plodded homeward, Ben was thinking of his predecessor. He had a rather good idea what Henry Bessman had meant, and he reasoned readily that if what he had seen had done Henry no harm, it would do him none either. What, he wondered, would the vicar say?

THE vicar came over to the church just before sundown and sat in the last pew next to the wall. He suggested that Ben go about his work just as always, just as he had done on the previous night, and Ben did so without demur; he would not have liked standing in the darkening church waiting for the door to begin closing once more.

The vicar sat alone and waited, acknowledging to himself that there was a certain comfort in Ben's stolid presence. The air within the church was close; June was hot and humid; outside larks sang their vespers, which mingled with the sleepy cheepings of lesser birds already settling down for the night.

The door, the vicar marked, did just what Ben Thompson said it did. Each time Ben opened it, the door stood for a few seconds as Ben had left it; then slowly, almost imperceptibly, it began to close, precisely as if it were being drawn shut. The vicar watched, fascinated. As the dusk flowed into the church, he began to feel definitely uneasy. For one thing, a kind of cloudlike darkness hovered at the door; for another, a similar tangible darkness coupled with chillness occupied the other end of the pew in which he sat.

At the same time, the vicar was aware of an aura of evil which seemed to emanate from the far end of the pew. It was uncanny and profoundly disturbing; he was as conscious of it as he was of the diminishing light, and he knew, as Ben Thompson had known, that it was not hallucination or fancy before his eyes.

As the dusk deepened, the dark masses at the door and in the pew took dim, suggestive shape. Two men there—the one coming in, the other lurking half-hidden in the pew. Of this the vicar could be sure. But of what manner of men they were, he could not guess, save that his dark companion in the pew gave off a quaking atmosphere of evil.

But even as he sat musing in this fashion, trying to establish a reason for being of these dark entities, he witnessed the culmination of the drama which was being perpetually reenacted about the closing door of the passage through which he himself had walked countless times. The tall dark figure coming through the door was the object of a sudden, swift attack by the figure in the pew. There was a terrified surge of evil power, an entanglement of figures, then nothing, nothing at all but the silence and the heavy breathing of Ben Thompson, who had also seen once more.

The time had been the same as before—that hour when dusk turns into night.

Ben walked out of the church with the vicar, who went sturdily through the passage, as was his custom. They stood outside under the stars for a moment.

"Do you believe in ghosts, Mr. Thompson?" asked the vicar abruptly.

"I believe in what I see," said Ben, "and what I hear and what I taste, such as you might say."

"A materialist," sighed the Reverend McDonal. "What a pity!"

"Do you?" asked Ben bluntly.

"I do and I don't," replied the vicar cryptically. "I think it would be just as well if the cleaning were got over with before sundown."

"Just as it was with Henry," muttered Ben. "That fellow knew, too."

Each of them went his separate way. Ben was bursting to tell his cronies all about his adventure, but he decided to hold his tongue; the men at the *Fox & Hound* had a way of ridicule about them. But he thought persistently about what he had seen; that the vicar had seen it, too, only

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confirmed him in his own opinion that he had not been the victim of either illusion or hallucination.

In the night he sat up in bed abruptly, awakened from a sound sleep. He shook his wife awake.

"Marget, d'you remember Reverend Billings?"

"Oh, go to sleep," she muttered.

"I recall him well. A big, tall fellow, like McDonal. He had enemies."

"So do we all," said Marget philosophically. "Try to get some sleep, Ben."

"You remember how he disappeared?"

"Not likely. I wasn't there."

"The hour, the hour, I mean. Was it not sundown or just after?"

"He was seen last just before sundown," said Marget.

"On his way to church."

It all fitted in so well. At that same time one of the vestrymen with whom the vicar had had a bitter quarrel disappeared, too. Neither had ever been seen again, and a shortage in the vestryman's funds led to the belief that he had run off with the money entrusted to his care.

AT THIS hour, after long and dutiful meditation, the Reverend Kilvert McDonal was writing a letter to his bishop, soliciting the rites of exorcism. "There is certainly some evil associated with St. Jude's," he wrote soberly. "Exorcism is plainly indicated, after which the church can be consecrated anew. I earnestly commend this matter to your attention. Above all else, we must keep the matter quiet, lest we arouse the curiosity, and, I fear, the ridicule, of the people."

The bishop was as grave and considerate as the vicar. He came down one day and quietly performed the rites of exorcism. If the vicar had hoped to view an evil spirit in retreat, he was disappointed; nothing at all happened, except there was a bad smell in the church. This lingered unpleasantly for days.

Thereafter, the bishop blessed the church anew.

That night all three of them waited upon the events of dusk, beginning with the closing door. And that evening the door did not close; it stayed just as Ben left it. Only the bishop, who was a saintly man, was not surprised.

It was Ben, however, who was the practical one of the three. He reasoned quite correctly that if there had been ghosts, there must have been something more solid and substantial before them. If old Weller had really hidden himself in that pew and assaulted the Reverend Billings, they must have gone somewhere. Wrestling in the church, in the passage. Outside, too, perhaps.

Well, now, he asked himself, what was the distance to the carp pond?

This was a simple measurement no one had thought to take in the thirty years since the Reverend Billings' disappearance. People had taken it for granted that Weller had gone with the money and that the vicar had gone along, not alone for the purpose of saving Weller's soul.

The carp pond was plainly indicated. In the morning Ben went around early to the pond and, after diligent search, he dragged up the bones of two middle-aged men, the vicar and Weller, Ben had no doubt.

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Ordinary Fiddler's Ghost

THERE IS A YARN ABOUT A FIDDLER CALLED JOHN WHO HAD FIDDLED HIS WAY TO FAME BY WINNING THE MUSICAL CONTEST YEAR AFTER YEAR. COMPETITION GAVE UP IN DESPAIR, LEAVING HIM KING OF THE MUSIC. NO ONE ELSE COULD PUT AS MUCH INTO A SONG. AS HE GREW OLDER HIS TUNES GREW AS WELL, BUT THERE CAME A TIME WHEN HE WAS OLD & DECREPIT & PEOPLE ASKED "WILL JOHN BE THERE NEXT TIME"? THE NEXT TIME CAME. IT WAS COLD & SNOWING. MANY PEOPLE CAME TO THE CONTEST. THE MUSICIANS PLAYED & IT GREW LATE & JOHN HAD NOT APPEARED. AS IT NEARED THE TIME TO MAKE AN END OF IT, THE DOOR OPENED & THERE STOOD JOHN. WITHOUT A WORD OR SMILE HE WALKED TO THE DIAS & PLAYED THE SWEETEST MUSIC EVER. WHEN THE TUNE WAS OVER HE WENT SILENTLY OUT INTO THE NIGHT. JOHN, ORDINARILY WAS JOLLY & WELL SPOKEN & PEOPLE WONDERED AT HIS QUIET THAT NIGHT. SOME OF THEM FOLLOWED HIS TRACKS TO HIS HOME. THEY WENT INTO A COLD, DARK ROOM. SOMEONE LIT A CANDLE & THERE IN THE CORNER, HALF EATEN BY THE RATS LAY THE REMAINS OF JOHN. HE HAD BEEN DEAD FOR WEEKS.

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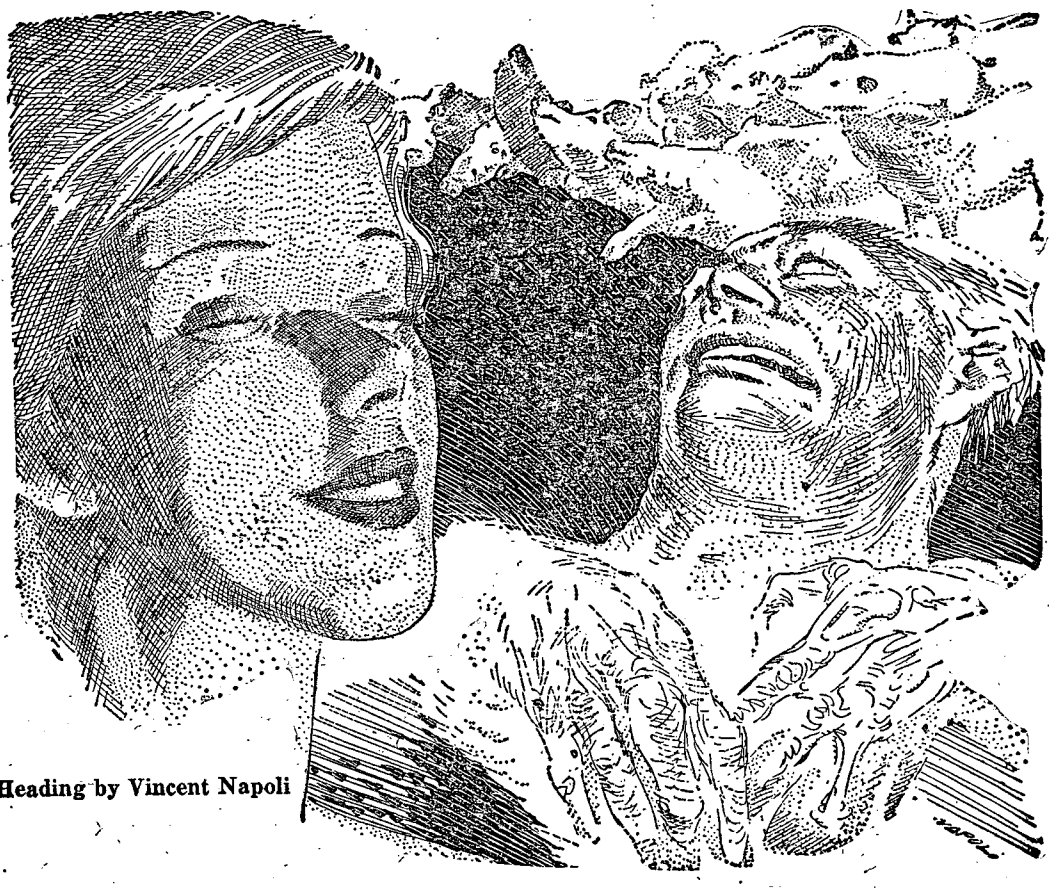
Ever hear of a pig with a hare lip?



Heading by Vincent Napoli

Mrs. Hawk

BY MARGARET ST. CLAIR

MRS. HAWK advertised in matrimonial papers. It was a weakness which other women, notably Belle Gunness, have shared with her. (You may have heard of Belle. When they began digging up the bodies, the newspapermen hit on "Abattoir Acres" as a name for her place.)

Like Belle, Mrs. Hawk lived on an isolated farm. Like Belle, she raised pigs. But she took a far better picture than heavy, coarse-featured Belle ever did, and she was not so insistent on financial qualifications in her suitors as Belle was. Instead of drugged coffee, she gave them hard cider to drink. And. . . .

Andrew Fruness lived in Fruness Creek, some seventeen miles from Mrs. Hawk's place. In winter he hunted, in summer he fished. At both seasons he helped out enough in the store so that his relations broke even on his room and board. Since Andrew had

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a slight harelip and had never displayed the least interest in feminine company, his brother and sister-in-law had long ago classed him as permanently celibate.

In this they were wrong. Living in an age in which polygamy by stages has become the norm and where it is easier to get out of an uncomfortable matrimonial alliance than it is to escape onerous payments on an automobile, Andrew had become infected with the blight. Two or three months ago he had sent off for a copy of "Wedding Bells," and by now the ferment of romance was stirring yeastily in him.

Andrew went through "Wedding Bells" carefully. He eliminated all the competitors except Mrs. Hawk and a widow who said she was "independently wealthy, affectionate." Mrs. Hawk had two advantages over the widow. According to her picture she was as handsome as a movie star, and she lived so close to Andrew that it would be easy to find how much she resembled the picture. Andrew put a mark beside her name.

He got a tablet of writing paper from his suitcase. He began to write, bearing down hard on the pencil. "Dear friend," he indited slowly, "I saw your ad in the marriage paper and . . . .

The fates began to chuckle and roll up their sleeves.

MRS. HAWK had no near neighbors. Except for her hired man who was so old and unattractive that even rural gossip balked at the notion of a liason between him and his employer, she lived alone. Under these cirmustances she was able to get away with it for a long time.

But when Andrew had been missing for two weeks his sister-in-law searched his room. She found the copy of "Wedding Bells" and the mark beside Mrs. Hawk's name. She held the writing tablet obliquely to the light and was able to make out the impression of the letter Andrew had written Mrs. Hawk. Lucille decided to see the county sheriff.

Sheriff Willets was a thick-set man in early middle age. He took his job seriously and was a great reader of fact-detective magazines. A vein of fantasy in his nature was revealed in his vegetable garden where, beside the conventional corn and beets, he tried to grow Perfume Bushes, Yard-Long Beans, and Vegetable Spaghetti. They never amounted to anything.

Willets listened carefully to what Lucille had to say. He had met Andrew once or twice. He was the more inclined to credit Lucille's account because, two or three days before, he had had a letter from a Mrs. Norma Vesh of Chicago, Ill. In the letter Mrs. Vesh said that her son, Norman, had left home two months ago to visit a Mrs. Hawk in the northern part of the state. She hadn't heard from him since, and she wanted Sheriff Willets to look for him.

After Willets had examined the copy of "Wedding Bells" and the writing tablet bearing the traces of Andrew's letter, he got in his car and drove out to see Mrs. Hawk.

It was the first time Willets had seen her close, and he was surprised at her good looks. The picture in "Wedding Bells," with its glamorous, cinematic quality, flattered her in one respect only, that it omitted a certain edgy quality in her handsomeness. There was something brittle and sharp about Mrs. Hawk. Her figure, by any standard, was above reproach.

She led Willets into the living room, where an open fire was burning and the air was agreeably scented with cedar from the smoke. Two peacock feathers on the wall were crossed with a long-handled ivory Japanese back-scratcher. It was a sort of decoration Willets had not seen for years. While he explained to Mrs. Hawk why he had come, she stitched away on a quilt in a circular frame. Her hands made a smooth, agreeable pattern as they moved.

When Willets had done speaking, Mrs. Hawk went to the sideboard and brought back the original letter Andrew had written. She had, she said, answered it, asking him to come to call on her, rather more than a week ago. Andrew had never shown up.

As to Norman Vesh (here Mrs. Hawk got another letter from the drawer in the sideboard and handed it to Willets), he

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had, just as Mrs. Vesh said, come to see her. In fact, he had slept in the Hawk guest room overnight. But—here Mrs. Hawk pushed a tendril of auburn hair back from her forehead and sighed—he had decided that Mrs. Hawk, seen in the flesh, was too old for him. He'd hoped they could keep on being friends, but he wanted a girl nearer his own age. He'd gone away the next morning, and Mrs. Hawk was still looking for a man to help her with the farm.

Willets listened to this explanation with indignation and incredulity. What she said about Andrew might possibly be true. It was possible that Andrew, overcome at the last moment by social shyness and chagrin at his facial deformity, had decided not to keep his date. But Willets considered the yarn about Vesh an insult to his intelligence.

Not only was Mrs. Hawk the possessor of a degree of pulchritude almost unknown among farm women, she was also the sole owner of a prosperous, unencumbered farm. Her bacon, hams, and pickled pork were beginning to enjoy a more than local reputation. That a man of the economic level of Norman Vesh (he spoke in the letter of having nothing to offer Mrs. Hawk except a loving heart) had refused a chance to marry a woman like Mrs. Hawk because of some nonsense about a difference in age, was incredible. It struck Willets as the biggest piece of foolishness he'd ever heard in his life.

He kept this conviction to himself. Tactfully he led the conversation toward the weather, crop prospects, and the price of pork. By the time he was saying he really must be going, Mrs. Hawk was volunteering to show him the farm.

The sheriff accepted thankfully. Mrs. Hawk pulled a screen in front of the fire, put her quilt to one side, and they went out into the yard.

THE tour she took him on was a thorough one. They looked at the corn on the south forty, discussed whether alfalfa or soybeans would be better next year for the acreage out behind the barn, and decided that the melilotus had done much better than you would have had any business to expect. At one point Mrs. Hawk even took him down cellar in her house and asked him whether he thought putting in radiant heating and a water heater would be practical. Willets replied slowly that yes, he did, while he glanced around the cellar and saw that the earth floor was entirely undisturbed. Then they went out to look at the pigs.

The pigs were the glory of the Hawk farm, its pride, its passion, its raison d'être. A number of ingenious devices had reduced odor and flies to a minimum, and the pigs were the fattest and healthiest Willets had ever seen. He told Mrs. Hawk this. She seemed pleased.

They were about to turn away from the pigs' quarters when Willets caught sight of a small black and white pig. He looked at it blankly for an instant or two before he realized what was unusual about it. The pig had a harelip.

He mentioned this deformity to Mrs. Hawk, saying that it was the first time he'd ever seen a harelip on a pig, and she laughed and said yes, it was unusual, wasn't it? But he was putting on weight nicely, and she thought she'd butcher him next week. She liked a continuous supply of pork.

Then they visited the slaughterhouse and the smoke house. There was nothing in the least abnormal in either place. Mrs. Hawk offered Willets a glass of cider. He refused it with thanks, and started home.

He drove slowly. There were things on his mind. Not only had Mrs. Hawk's story seemed to him an ill-considered pack of lies, he also felt that there was something odd about the farm itself. What? Willets thudded into pot holes and over ruts for two or three miles before the answer came to him. It was the expression of the pigs.

An old farm boy himself, Willets knew that pigs (except when they are mating, at which time they radiate enjoyment) have no expression except piggishness. A pig eats noisily and tends to smell bad; otherwise he is an almost complete social cipher. But Mrs. Hawk's pigs had had as much expression, as much presence, as a group of melan-

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choly poets. Despite their excellent physical condition, they had seemed to radiate gloom and discontent. If those pigs had been cows, their picture would not have been reproduced on a single can of milk.

Mrs. Willets had pork steak with apples for supper. When the meal was over the sheriff settled down with a cigar and tried to think.

Edward Willets, Jr., had turned the radio on as soon as he had gone upstairs to study. By now the whole house was shaking with the noise.

"Turn that thing DOWN!" Willets bellowed in the direction of his son's room. "How do you expect us to stand that racket?"

The volume of sound diminished slightly. "He's only a boy, father," Mrs. Willets said soothingly.

"I expect a little consideration from him," Willets answered. He gestured with his cigar, and the ash dribbled annoyingly on his vest.

"If you'd take a little more interest in him. . . ." Mrs. Willets murmured.

The sheriff snorted and went back to his problem. What had she done with the bodies? Mrs. Hawk's farm was isolated, but it fronted on the county road. She couldn't have burned them. Burial was more likely. But she had taken Willets all over the farm, and nowhere had he seen a spot which struck him as a likely one. If she had neither burned nor buried the bodies of her suitors, what on earth had she done with them?

By ten o'clock he was still unsure. He stopped by in Edward Jr.'s room on his way to bed. No doubt Mrs. Willets was right, and he ought to take more interest in the kid.

"What are you doing, son?" he asked. "Still hard at work?"

"Just finishing, pop," Edward replied. "Writing a theme about the old Greek myths."

"Don't call me 'pop,'" Willets replied irritably. "Let's see your paper." He held out a hand for it.

"Circe," Willets read in the second paragraph, "was an enchantress who lived on an island. She turned people into pigs by giving them drinks with a magic herb in it. Another myth is that the reason we have summer and winter is because . . ."

"Interesting," Willets said. He gave the paper back.

"Yep. Say, you know what, po—I mean, sir? Circe is Greek for hawk. The teacher told us it means hawk."

In the hours between ten p.m. and three Willets went through the stages from incredulity to doubt to qualified belief. The conclusion he arrived at just before he went to sleep was that if what he suspected was true, Mrs. Hawk's racket was uniquely neat. No danger, no fuss, and a supply of pigs limited only by the number of unmarried males in the county. With pork products selling at present prices, no wonder she was talking about installing radiant heating.

Willets came down late for breakfast. Edward Jr. had forgotten his copy of "Ancient Greek Myths," and Willets read it while he ate.

He found out nothing useful. It seemed that Circe had been prevented from turning a character named Odysseus into a pig by a "magic herb" somebody named Hermes had given him. *What* magic herb? The book did not say.

At eleven Willets met with the county supervisors and at three he addressed the local PTA on "Juvenile Delinquency." It was nearly five before he got out to Mrs. Hawk's farm. He had no particular plan in mind.

He found her feeding the pigs. She was wearing close-fitting gray flannel slacks and a soft gray-green sweater. Its color went with her greenish eyes. In one hand she carried the back-scratcher from the living room.

Willets told her he'd been wondering about Vesh's state of mind when she had last seen him, and whether Vesh had dropped any hint as to what his plans were.

Mrs. Hawk pushed her sweater sleeves up from her creamy arms. Thoughtfully she answered that Mr. Vesh had seemed quite upset when he found she was too old for him. (Willets eyed the curves the slacks and the sweater revealed, and snorted mentally.) Vesh had said something about going

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on out to Los Angeles. Probably he was in California by now, and his mother would hear from him any day.

"Well—thank you," Willets said. The pig with the harelip had pushed itself through the ranks of the other pigs and was looking at him with a tortured, significant gaze.

"Won't you come in and have a glass of cider with me before you go?" Mrs. Hawk asked. At the words the pigs in the pen set up a sort of gobbling roar.

Mrs. Hawk turned and made a cut in the air at them with the ivory back-scratcher. Instantly the noise ceased; the pigs in the enclosure stood frozen and completely motionless.

"Pigs can be trained to do all sorts of things," Mrs. Hawk said.

AS HE followed the enchantress toward the house to have the cider, Willets discovered that he was afraid. It was a blank-faced fear that seemed to fill the landscape and press down upon him like tons of water. It seemed to him that fear was oozing out through his skin like jelly from a cheesecloth bag.

Mrs. Hawk brought the glasses of cider and set them down on a table by the fire. She seated herself opposite Willets and handed him one of the glasses.

There was a sudden piercing barrage of oinks and grunts from the pigs outside. Mrs. Hawk, her lips pinched together and the back-scratcher in her hand, got up and went toward the door; and Willets, his fingers amazingly steady, traded glasses with her.

When the noise stopped and she came back, he was sitting quietly in his chair, his hands folded in front of him. Mrs. Hawk looked at him sharply. She was just about to sit down when she said Oh! she'd forgotten the doughnuts, some spiced doughnuts she'd made that morning. People said they were so good.

She stuck the doughnuts under his nose and Willets took one, while he held on to his glass with the other hand. He was taking no chances on her trading glasses with him again.

Despite his belief that the cider was harmless, Willets could barely swallow it. He forced himself to finish the doughnut, lest Mrs. Hawk become suspicious. It was certainly highly spiced, with a not unpleasant taste of nutmeg, ginger, and cinnamon.

Mrs. Hawk put her glass down, empty, on the table. She picked up the ivory-tipped back-scratcher. The charm, in default of another victim, would work on her, and Willets felt a heady foretaste of victory moving in his veins. Once Mrs. Hawk was out of the way, he would have plenty of time to decide what to do about the pigs.

* * * * * *

Her green eyes told him the truth. He tried to run, to get out of the room, but he was strangling, lost, drowning in his clothes. "It was the doughnuts!" he wanted to say, but all that came out was a high squealing grunt.

Mrs. Hawk looked down at her new pig. For a moment her detached, polite smile turned into a wide frigid grin of triumph. Then she took the back-scratcher and began to prod Willets toward the slaughterhouse.

In the next WEIRD TALES

"LEGAL RITES"

Isaac Asimov

AND

James McCreigh

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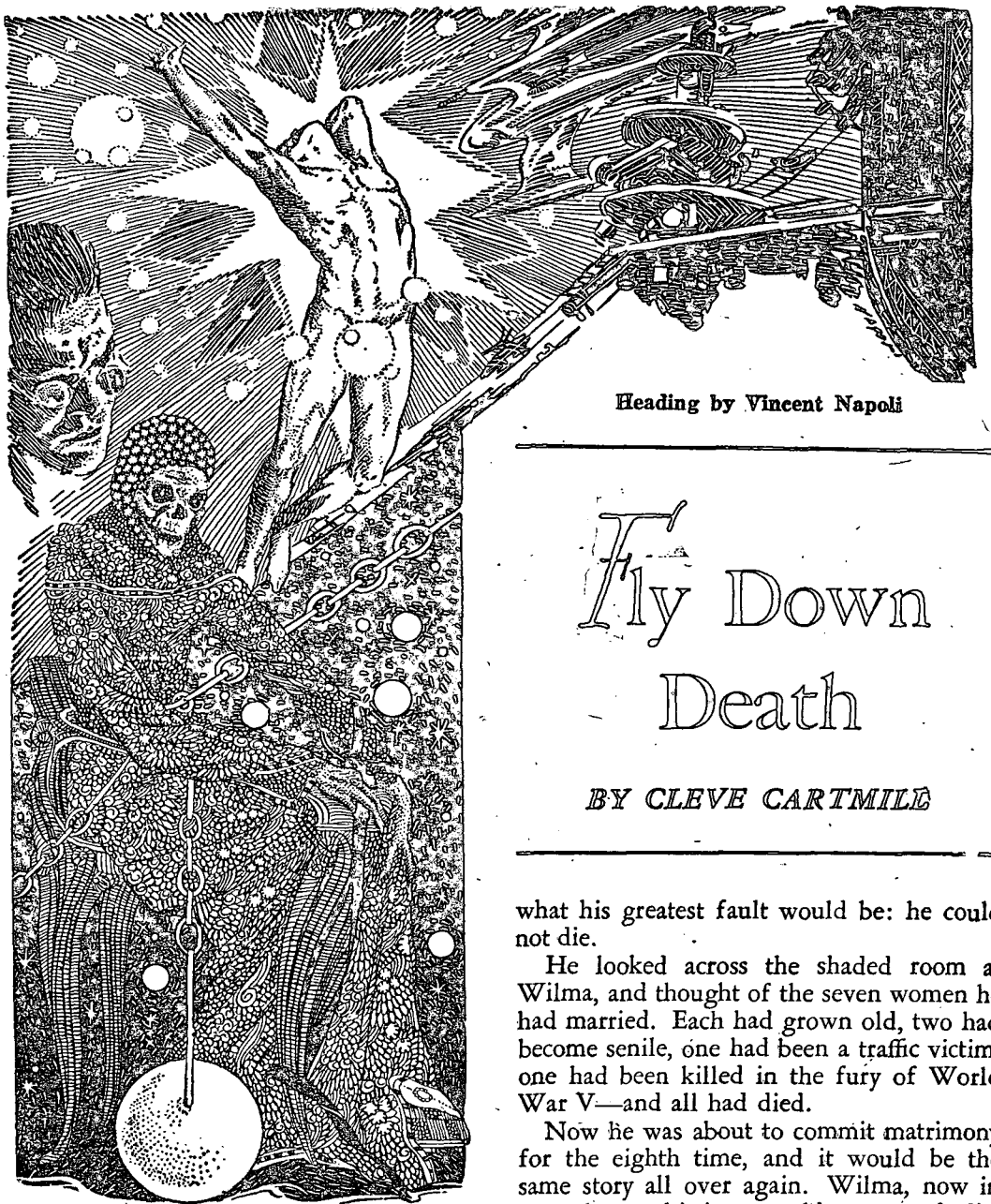

Heading by Vincent Napoli

Fly Down Death

BY CLEVE CARTMILL

The height of folly to immortalize a growing race until after the stars themselves are conquered.

DAMON DE BREK had his faults. His mother admitted it when he was a child. But that was 500 years ago, and even then she didn't know what his greatest fault would be: he could not die.

He looked across the shaded room at Wilma, and thought of the seven women he had married. Each had grown old, two had become senile, one had been a traffic victim, one had been killed in the fury of World War V—and all had died.

Now he was about to commit matrimony for the eighth time, and it would be the same story all over again. Wilma, now in her plump thirties, would age—and die. But he would stay as he was, as he had stayed for 470 years, an apparent youngster.

He would have to change his name again, contrive a new set of birth credentials, and move to a new community. He felt suddenly nauseated.

"I want to die with you," he said.

Her dark eyes widened. "Of all things," she said.

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He smiled wryly. "I don't know why I said that." He paused, frowned. "I do know. I don't want to live in a world that has no Wilma. I guess that's it."

She got out of her chair, crossed to him. She put a slim hand on his auburn hair. "Thanks," she said. "Thanks very much."

He rose and looked into her upturned face. "There's something I have to do. I don't know how long it will take, but I'll be back. Will you wait?"

Characteristically, she didn't ask questions. Her eyes were untroubled, her brow serene. "I'll wait."

He went out to his runabout and got it into the air without thinking of the mechanical operations he performed. He flattened out at the civilian level automatically and fixed his thoughts on his task.

Somewhere in the world, somewhere, was Dr. H. J. Clarke.

The doctor, too, must have lived under a variety of names, must have married a variety of women, must also have grown tired of living.

Damon remembered their only meeting. He had been 128 years old, and puzzled. His first two wives had died, he was using his third pseudonym. James, Gracken? Which was it? He couldn't remember.

But he remembered the doctor seeking him out. "Perhaps," he said, "I did wrong. Perhaps one shouldn't interfere with the life process. I did it only on you. And myself, of course. I was playing God, and I have come to apologize."

Damon looked at the doctor, white-haired but vigorous, seeming to be in his forties, and listened with astonishment to the tale of two centuries. Dr. Clarke had been at Concord, and the shot heard round the world had been fired at him. He had discovered the stimulant, which replaced body tissues as fast as they were used, in 1791. He had proved to his own satisfaction, in 1950, that one injection would make a man immortal, barring accident, and had given the baby Damon de Brek the treatment.

"But why?" Damon asked in despair.

"Curiosity," Dr. Clarke answered. "And I say again, I'm sorry."

But now what, he asked himself as scattered evening lights began to glow beneath him. Did one place an advertisement blindly and hope to attract the attention of the man wisest of all in the ways of anonymity? Dr. Clarke had forgotten more than he, Damon, would ever know, and like himself was probably uninterested in public communication.

A man who had lived more than seven centuries had seen the pattern of human events repeat itself over and over again. He had seen democracies devolve into dictatorships, and vice versa. He had observed the repetitious nature of events, differing only in the extent of scientific progress. He would want no part of history, dodging as he must the cold brightness of publicity which would result from exposure.

Such a man, who had read everything, would have no interest in reading. Such a man, like himself, who had heard and seen everything, would have no interest in looking at screens. Such a man, like himself, who must devoutly wish he could die would not be concerned with the paltry efforts of the living. How, then, could he be found?

Music? It offered possibilities. Not a symphony, not a concerto, not a suite or sonata, for the doctor might not be a classical devotee. But whatever he was, even if a music hater, he could not escape a popular song, a hit tune. That ubiquitous blight of civilization was always in everybody's ears. It was inescapable.

HE BROUGHT his plane down on his own building and descended to his apartment in thoughtful silence. He flipped the switch that converted one wall of his bedroom into a mirror and stared hard at his perpetually youthful features.

"Get cold," he said, and the idea was born.

He decided on a harp, for that was the instrument with which he was most familiar. Also, it would give the song that feeling of holy desire for death which he wanted to achieve.

He uncovered the harp and began to doodle. He let his fingers stray idly over the strings until a fugitive, haunting phrase was born. He built his melody about this,

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and let the words form themselves in his mind.

His was not a commercial voice, but he didn't sing the words, he whispered them. They told his own tale, a man unable to die who had found true love. If only he could *"Get Cold"* when his loved one did, he could live—and die—happily.

He made a wire recording and went to bed.

J. RANDOLPH CALLAN, the producer, received Damon after an understandable wait, and listened to the song. His mouth, a thin, prim line above his square chin, showed nothing. His dark, alert eyes under white bushy brows, held no expression. When the song was ended, he pushed three buttons.

Two girls and a man came in. "Listen to this," Callan said, and played the song again.

Damon hardly noticed their reactions. He knew what they would be. Tears would sting the eyes when that haunting phrase came up, with the words, "Death, the sweet couch beholding." A gulp would come with "At last, at last, get cold."

Seven minutes later he had made the agreement, in an hour he had signed. He went to see Wilma.

"I didn't ask you," he said. "But it's under your name. I didn't want to use my own."

He didn't tell her that he was afraid somebody might look up the record on himself, which existed in various places. He watched, with somber satisfaction, the glow in her dear dark eyes, the smile, the puzzlement.

"But—" she said.

"Please," he said. "Indulge me."

"Of course."

IT WAS two weeks before the doctor got in touch with Wilma, and then only indirectly.

Damon was there when three polite young men, dressed in sober business cloth, arrived and requested a private interview with her. They showed credentials which said they were agents of the International Bureau of Investigation, and were quite firm, though still polite, about Damon going elsewhere. He went outside, in the patio.

He was recalled almost immediately. The trio's spokesman wasted no time on preliminaries. "Damon de Brek?"

"Yes," Damon said easily. "I expected you sooner."

This got a flicker of surprise. "You expected us?"

"I expected somebody. Not necessarily you."

"I—see," said the young man in a tone which indicated he did not see at all. "Very well. We have orders to bring you unharmed, but by force if necessary, to headquarters."

"I'm ready. Will you allow me a few moments in privacy with my fiancée?"

"Of course." The young man turned to Wilma. "Sorry to intrude. Thank you for your courtesy."

Wilma inclined her head, her expression one of fear and puzzlement. The men withdrew, to wait in their official aircar for Damon.

"What does it mean, Damon?" Wilma asked anxiously.

He took her face in his hands. "Happiness for us," he said gently. "Don't worry, I'll be back soon."

"But all those names," she said. "They read me a list of six or eight names and asked me if I knew any one of them. If I had thought it was going to get you in trouble—"

"Not trouble," he interrupted. "Just the opposite. I'll have to go now. I'll explain when I get back. Will you return my runabout to my place, please?"

He kissed her and went outside. The doctor, he reflected, must have kept in touch with his various lives. "All those names" must have been a list of his successive identities.

The young men took him to IBI headquarters, landed on the roof, and escorted him to the Bureau chief, who was, of course, Dr. Clarke.

Damon was shocked by the doctor's appearance. The man *looked* old. Not that his skin hung in folds, nor did his hands

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show the liver-spots of age. It was apparent to Damon, as it would not have been to anybody else, in the doctor's eyes and posture.

The eyes, alert and gray behind corrective lenses, held an awareness of mortality, as do the eyes of all men who are born to die. The posture was that of all mortal men; indicating a spiritual eye looking over the shoulder at the gradual approach of the grim phantom.

"Sit down!" Dr. Clarke snapped. "And don't talk."

Damon obeyed, surprised. If long life imparted anything to a person, it was patience. He well remembered the quiet patience of the doctor nearly 400 years before. But this man before him had none of that. He was quick and sharp, with the restlessness of those who see an end.

"I heard the song," Dr. Clarke said. "I knew it was yours. You can forget it."

"Forget what?"

"Quiet! You can forget your desire to die, unless you kill yourself or a mountain falls on you. I won't give you the antidote."

"You found one?"

"I ordered you to be silent! I'll have you gagged if you interrupt again. Of course, I found an antidote. Can't you see that I've aged, that I'm dying? I've done it deliberately, for the same reason you want it. I found *the* woman. And to forestall your next question, I'll tell you why I didn't make her immortal. I couldn't. She has a cell-destroying disease that had gone too far to be checked, when I discovered it. Now you may ask your next question, though I know what it will be. It's *why*."

"Exactly," Damon replied. "Why won't you let me die?"

"Because I'm disgusted. Not only with you, but with me. What have you done with your life? One moment."

The doctor stamped from his desk to a wall panel, where he made certain motions and sounds. This slid aside to reveal a series of cabinets. He took a thick folder from one of these and returned to his desk.

"This is my personal, secret file on you. I've assembled it myself. It has several gaps, but it represents the negligible contributions you have made to the common good."

HE REMOVED a single sheet from the file and scanned it.

"You were president of the Western Federation of Nations two hundred years ago. You held that position until the planetary amalgamation. That came about through no fault of yours, I might add. You have published two volumes of imaginary mathematics, of dubious value. Can you name anything else you have done in the common interest?"

"No-o," Damon admitted.

"Exactly. Yours has been a career of hiding. You've risen to mediocrity in a number of trades and professions, abandoning each with each change of identity. You're nothing but an immortal dilettante. And I say the same thing of myself. That's another reason why I am dying."

Dr. Clarke fell quiet, but his contempt was almost audible in the still room. His eyes were filled with it, and his mouth curled. His strong hands were tense on Damon's dossier. Damon remained in silent thought.

"If the existence of any individual can be justified at all," Dr. Clarke said presently, "it is only to the degree that he strives for the advancement of the race. I pride myself on one achievement in that respect—you."

Damon uttered a short, explosive laugh. "You've just denounced me as being worthless."

"And truly denounced. What I mean is that you will be a living monument to my ability to have immortalized the race. If I had so chosen, all men could have lived forever in perfect health. It will remain a secret, but *you* will know. That's a source of pride to me."

Damon frowned at the doctor. "Egomania," he said.

Dr. Clarke shrugged. "In a sense, I created you. I am the only man in history who has created an immortal. I am going to my cremation with the knowledge that I have left my mark. And I have no fear that you will destroy yourself without my coopera-

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tion. You'd have done it before this, if you were suicidal."

Damon sighed, his mind darting in and around the doctor's various statements, seeking some weak spot where he could drive a wedge of argument. Dr. Clarke put into words Damon's own despairing summation.

"True, I have become the active head of this organization. I held this position once before, under a different identity. That in itself is an achievement, but after all, I am merely the director of a spy ring. Still, this puts me in an invulnerable position as far as you are concerned. I can see that you are determined to obtain the formula for the antidote. But you're helpless. You can't threaten me with violence or torture, for I have the means of preventing you—a staff of strong young men, instantly available. You can't threaten me with exposure, because I am dying. You can't threaten me with death, because even if you should kill me before I could summon help, you'd defeat your own purpose. You'd still be immortal, and I alone know how to give you a normal death."

This, Damon reflected, was the sad and bitter truth. Better that he get out of here to where he could think in private. He had to reach a decision about himself—and Wilma.

Dr. Clarke forestalled any such action.

"Dismiss any idea of leaving this building until after my death."

Damon stared. "I'm a prisoner? On what charge?"

"Any charge I choose, or none. You will simply disappear." Dr. Clarke smiled grimly. "You've done it before."

"But why?" Damon demanded.

"Because you've learned too much about practical psychology. You might—just might—discover some weak spot in my position, some way to force the secret from me. If you're helpless under lock and key, you can't translate any such discovery into action. And I won't see you again. I'll leave orders to release you when I'm dead."

"But that might be twenty years or more!"

"And what is that to a man who has lived centuries?"

"And . . . my fiancée?"

Dr. Clarke shrugged. "There will be others."

"You've gone mad!"

DR. CLARKE'S eyes were cold, dispassionate. "Argument gets us nowhere." He touched a button, and two strong men came in. "You know what to do," Dr. Clarke said. "He is to have every possible care, and absolutely no opportunity to kill himself."

The two men advanced on Damon. He promptly knocked one down, kicked the other in the groin, and turned on Dr. Clarke.

"I'm going out of here," he said quietly. He strode to the door which opened to admit four more men. It closed behind them and they stood, bunched, with their backs against it.

"He is not to be harmed," Dr. Clarke warned.

Damon sized up the situation. The two behind him would be back in action any moment, and the quartette at the door blocked the only exit. He must get his back to a wall and try to break through when they advanced.

He darted to the wall and waited, muscles tense and poised, his thoughts marching in calm array. The first two were up now, one white with pain, the other shaking grogginess from his head. They moved on him, a slow step at a time, and two others moved in from the other flank. The remaining two stood as they were, guarding the door.

Not a word was spoken. It was like a ballet, lacking only music, the dancers closing in graceful adagio on the poised and watchful quarry. They moved in a semicircle, closing the gaps as they drew nearer, blocking him in front and on either side.

Damon suddenly feinted to one side, and with a blurring change of direction plunged at the first two, the weakest point of the attacking formation. His fists moved with the speed of striking snakes and the force of clubs, and he was through. He leaped for the door.

The guards were as quick and agile as he,

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but they were under disadvantages. They were not to harm him, and he had the jump on them.

He reached the door ten paces ahead of his nearest pursuer, slugged one guard with a lightning jab and seized the other. He hoisted him high, with smooth-flowing motion, and hurled him horizontally at the mass of his would-be captors. He jerked at the door, and was through.

He ran headlong into a dozen or more reinforcements, no doubt summoned by Dr. Clarke, and was overpowered gently but thoroughly. There was no formality of facing him with Dr. Clarke; he was led to a remote part of the building, to an air-conditioned, comfortably furnished apartment.

They took everything from him, in polite silence, and left him naked behind a strong locked door. He glared at it in frustration.

"Mr. de Brek," a voice said, and he jerked his eyes toward a screened communicator high on a wall. "You will find clothing, if you desire any, in the linen closet. The recreation room is stocked with everything possible for exercise and entertainment. The library holds a wide range of reading matter, from ancient to modern. Food will be prepared as and when you wish, delivered by a service elevator which opens into the wall of the dining alcove.

When you want to play competive games, there are Plastoids, specially constructed, to act as your opponents. Your apartment will be cleaned by Plastoids. As you know, these have no metal parts and are virtually indestructible. Even if you could immobilize and dismantle one, you would find nothing which could be made dangerous to your welfare. If you should endanger your health by any such childish action as a hunger strike, you will be hospitalized and force-fed. There is no metal of any kind in your apartment, so don't bother to search. You will have no direct contact with any human being as long as you are healthy, and, as has been said, self-induced illness will not improve your lot. The wall switch, at eye level directly below this speaker, will enable you to send requests to our Service Director. That is all."

Damon went to the wall and threw the switch.

"Yes?" the same voice answered.

"Will you send me up a portable cutting torch?"

A short pause ensued. Then, "That is Item Twelve on our restricted list, Mr. de Brek. Sorry."

Damon opened the switch. Not even a sense of humor in the joint, he thought bitterly.

HE PASSED the first week in earnest and futile consideration of his situation. There was indeed no metal available. The lights were gas-filled plastic tubes, their contacts buried in the wall. All else was smooth and rounded plastic, even the bathroom fixtures. The clothes were shining Plastene, with detachable and rounded fastenings. He couldn't cut his throat even if he had wanted to, and attack against that constantly guarded door was idiocy.

If he had been on vacation, he reflected wryly, he couldn't have chosen a more comfortable place. The food was delicious and plentiful, delivered shortly after his order in the tiny service elevator. The door of this was locked electronically unless the elevator were in direct alignment with it, so he had no access to the shaft itself as an avenue of escape.

But escape to what? He could possibly evade capture by the IBI, though that was doubtful, but it would mean that he would be hunted by the thousands of trained hunters for the next hundred years or so. No, if he escaped, he must escape to freedom—and Wilma.

This meant that he must find some means of forcing Dr. Clarke to turn over the death-giving formula. No reason, then, to hold Damon de Brek in prison.

But the doctor seemed invulnerable, as he had so succinctly pointed out. Still, there must be a weak spot.

Plastoids, admitted by guards who did not enter the room, cleaned the apartment. They rapped notice of completion on the door and trooped out with their buckets and brooms. One night, Damon requested a chess opponent, and one of the glistening,

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featureless creatures defeated him two games out of three in a three-hour session.

But he spent most of his time in the library, hoping he might get an idea from the array of books, printed and recorded. He found one he had never seen before, an old-fashioned volume printed before he was born. He had not finished the preface of "*If Man* LIVE" before he knew its author was Dr. Clarke, writing under a pseudonym.

He read it eagerly, hoping to find some fact that could be turned to his own advantage. Certain phrases stuck in his mind: ". . . continued existence would not necessarily bring wisdom to the individual. Many would merely grow older, cluttering their memories with unused knowledge." "It would be the height of folly to immortalize a growing race until after the stars themselves are conquered. Mankind must have room to expand, and if the secret of immortality is ever discovered, it must not be revealed until horizons are limitless."

On the Wandering Jew theme, granting that such a man ever existed: ". . . disappearing every forty years or so, for mortal men would kill the immortal, out of jealousy, fear, awe, and other emotions. And Love? how he must have longed for death with this or that mate, or that she could be immortal too. How wretched, oh miserable wretch!"

The doctor, young in his immortality at the time of writing, devoted two whole chapters to the discussion of Power.

"It would depend on the man," he summed up. "He could remain merely inconspicuous, if he were unambitious and selfish. But still without revealing his immortality, he could rule the race; through dictators of his own choosing, guiding them to his own selfish ends, or through benevolent directors, leading mankind down a glorious road of noble destiny that might reach even to the far glittering stars. Perhaps such a man may rise some day. Perhaps . . ."

Damon tossed the book aside. He knew all these things, many of them through experience. One fact alone was new: that Dr. Clarke had intended baby Damon de Brek to be that leader down that "glorious road of noble destiny" to the stars. All the rest was familiar fare. All the rest—But wait!

He reopened to the Wandering Jew section, read it swiftly and narrowed his eyes in thought. He had found the doctor's point of vulnerability. He had motive, now, to escape.

HE PUT his mind to work on that problem, and answerless days and nights crept past. He played chess again with a Plastoid, but his mind was not on the game. He was roundly defeated, and even before the departing Plastoid reached the door his eyes were closed in thought.

He couldn't rush the door on the rare occasions when it opened briefly. An overwhelming number of guards were present at such times. And yet the door was the only way out. He must be able to walk through it unchallenged, and that was impossible.

Or was it? The glimmering of an idea, having to do with the long-ago period when he was a clothes designer, sparkled faintly in his mind. He went to the clothes closet and examined the gleaming array of Plastene. It had the shimmer of the Plastoids. If he draped it properly about himself and secured it with the fasteners, he might possibly pass as one.

But he had the patience of centuries, and caution learned over the years. He spent two days examining the problem and planning his split-second schedule if he should win to freedom. He spent hours experimenting before the mirror, trying to conceal certain necessary roughness in the surface of his garment from the casual eye.

He achieved what he thought was a masterpiece of head covering and featureless mask. The pinpoint eyeholes were almost invisible even to him. But the legs and armpits gave him trouble.

However, he was finally satisfied, if a bit dubiously, and requested a chess player late on the third night. The colloidal automaton played with its usual conditioned brilliance, and Damon was checkmated two games straight. As the third game approached its inevitabe end, Damon went

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into the next room as the nerveless Plastoid considered a move. He returned with two stout belts and lashed its ankles together. Then he shoe-horned into his costume and went to the door.

This was the moment of crisis, but he had considered it well. The corridor was dimly-lighted, and the six guards were expecting a Plastoid. He had practiced the mechanical, though somehow fluid gait.

He rapped. The door opened. He shuffled through, turned along the hallway and forced himself to move at the deliberate speed of a Plastoid. He made it to the first turn without incident and rapidly approached the critical point of escape from the building, the guarded exit. He felt certain that one guard only would be posted at this time of night. He had personal business with that gentleman, for he knew that this building's Plastoids would not be allowed to leave it.

The guard was there, and watched Damon's approach with increasing suspicion. "Halt!" was the command at ten paces, but the guard made no move toward his blaster. Plastoids were conditioned never to harm human beings. Damon continued to advance steadily.

"Oh, Lord," the guard muttered. "Another one gone haywire." The guard stepped directly in front of Damon and uttered the sure-fire command: "In the name of humanity, stop!"

DAMON laid a long, looping right on the man's chin, caught him as he crumpled, and dragged him into the cubicle where personnel comings and goings were recorded. He stripped off the uniform, bound and gagged the unconscious guard, and emerged within seconds. He went to the roof, commandeered an official air car, and headed for his own apartment. Seconds were precious now, for the alarm might be given at any moment.

And the face of the guard he had slugged appeared on his screen just as he drifted to his own roof.

"All patrols attention! The special prisoner has escaped. He has an official car, and is wearing a guard's uniform. He will probably get rid of both of these. The Director is on his way to headquarters to—"

Damon jumped into his own car and took off. He dared not chance a change of clothes; they would expect him to do just that, and he might not even now get out of sight before a patrol arrived. He allowed himself a slight smile at the thought of where he was going. Nobody would look for him at the Director's home.

He was admitted by Mrs. Clarke, a serene, graying woman of great beauty. Damon was struck by her great blue eyes, which seemed lighted from within by a calm, spiritual glow. She took in Damon's uniform without comment or change of expression, and invited him inside in a voice full of rich music. He got to the point at once.

"Your husband wishes you to join him if you can. It is a matter of utmost importance and secrecy. That's why he sent a guard instead of calling you."

"Certainly," she said. "I'll be ready at once."

She asked no questions then, nor after they had taken off for a hiding-place Damon had used on several occasions when he had reason to disappear. This was a perfectly camouflaged dwelling high on a nearby mountain, deep in a park-like forest. A spring gurgled there, and he had imported every modern convenience.

He brought his runabout down in a steep curve that intersected electronic devices that opened what appeared to be the face of a slope. He drifted through the opening into a vaulted, well-lighted chamber, and helped his passenger to the soft floor covered with sparkling Malanite.

Mrs. Clarke looked around with interest at the flowing curves, the tapestries, the artfully hung paintings.

"How perfectly beautiful," she said in her perfectly musical voice. "I wonder who designed it?"

"Will you please come into the main building?"

He led her through a voice-operated panel, tuned to his basic pitch, into the apartment, and she gasped at its quiet splendor. She fingered the soft, glowing

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fabric of an inclined chair and sank into its curved embrace.

"I didn't know there was such furniture as this," she murmured.

"There isn't. I designed and made these furnishings in my spare time."

She considered this statement in thoughtful silence. She raised her eyes to his presently. "Then you are not an IBI guard?"

"No."

"I—see. My husband did not send you?"

"No. I kidnapped you."

"But why?"

"Your husband has something I want."

"He won't be blackmailed."

"I believe he will."

A short silence ensued while she appeared to be in deep thought. Then, "And if he refuses?"

"I'll have to kill you," Damon said softly. "I'm sorry."

"He'll refuse, and if you were my age you'd know that. You're young enough to think that death is something awful. I'm old enough to know that it doesn't matter, and so is my husband. You're using adolescent thinking."

"I'm afraid," Damon said, "you don't know some important things about your husband. And I do. But I must get to work. Will you give me the data on his private, closed channel? I can reach him through public relay stations, but I know he will want this kept in the very strictest secrecy."

"Very well," she said after a thoughtful pause, and gave him the information.

"Thank you," Damon said. "Before I go into my laboratory, I'd like to mention that it's useless to try to escape. The exits and entrances here are tuned to me alone. I wouldn't like you to tire yourself."

"Even if I am about to die?" she asked wryly.

"Even if you are about to die."

HE WENT into his laboratory, tuned his transmitter to the Director's private channel, and presently the doctor's face filled Damon's screen.

The doctor caught his breath when he

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recognized Damon. "How could you call on this channel?" he demanded.

"Your wife gave me the dope. I've kidnapped her, and I am prepared to go as far as necessary to get the formula for the antidote."

"You wouldn't . . . kill her?"

"Yes."

"What good would it do you?" the doctor asked angrily. "After I refuse to give you the formula, you'd have not helped yourself one iota. You'd still be what you are. And I *will* find you, eventually."

"I don't think you will refuse," Damon answered. "I think I have found your one vulnerable spot. Which is more important, your wife and the rest of your life, or leaving a meaningless monument to your dying ego?"

"I—don't know," Dr. Clarke said slowly.

"You've already sacrificed immortality for her. Are you going to make that sacrifice a joke for stubborn pride?"

"If I should give you the information you want, what would you do next?"

"Return your wife to her home."

"You'd walk into the arms of my agents?"

"Not a bit of it," Damon said. "You'd have no reason to hold me, once I had the formula."

"There's the matter of kidnapping," Dr. Clarke pointed out. "Punishable by death."

"Oh, no. You'll have to promise to drop the charge, and you can do it. Nobody but you, your wife and I know about this, and we can keep it secret."

"Suppose I give you false data, and arrest you again. You wouldn't escape a second time."

"If you were considering that, Doctor, you'd have done it before now. I'll accept your word of honor, but you'll have to give it to me. Another thing, Doctor. Perhaps you're trying to have my transmitter located. At the first alarm, and I have protective devices here, I'll break this off and do what I must."

"Let me appeal to you once more, Damon," Dr. Clarke said earnestly. "Did you read my book?"

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"Yes."

"Doesn't the possibility stir you?"

"As much as it did you. But I resent the inevitability of the thing. I have no choice. I have the same horror of living forever that normal people have of dying."

"I see. Very well. I have a certain sympathy for you, naturally. And I . . . . love my wife, Damon"

"I understand, Doctor."

"And I don't want to see you again, Damon. I would find that distasteful. I won't even go home to meet my wife. She can call me. I give you my word of honor that your conditions will be met, and that the information I am about to divulge is true. You will promise that no harm will come to my wife."

"I promise."

DR. CLARKE gave him the formula, and Damon returned Mrs. Clarke. She didn't bother to be polite on the return trip. Her voice did not reflect animosity or contempt, but the words themselves were razor-edged.

"Persons who show the cowardice you have shown aren't grown up, whoever you are," she said. "A man who goes out to fight for what he wants—good or bad—is at least a *man*. A blackmailer is a child crying for the moon. I hope I never see you again, and I shall remember your actions with shame."

Damon didn't answer. He went home and to bed.

The next morning he remained a long time in silent thought. Then he cleaned himself up and went directly to IBI headquarters and asked to see the Director. He may have been recognized, but no one spoke to him.

Dr. Clarke's aging face hardened with anger when Damon was ushered into his private office.

"Wait until I speak my piece," Damon said. "I've thought a great deal since last night, and I admit that your wife is right. I wasn't grown up. My resentment against living was adolescent. I was kidding myself when I thought I wanted to grow old and

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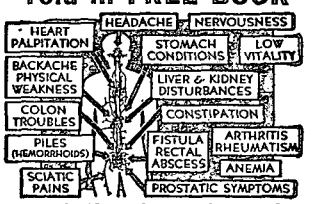

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die. Now that I have the choice, I'm going on living and carry out the program suggested in your book. But you're going to die, Doctor, and I think the secret of my immortality should be preserved. Will you give it to me?"

"Never," Dr. Clarke said firmly. "You're not mature enough to have such responsibility. But I found it. So can you, eventually, after you have conquered space and provided living room for an expanding race of immortals."

"Yes, I see your point. And I can do it. Barring accident, I have forever."

"The stars first, Damon."

"Yes, the stars first. Good-bye, Doctor."

"One thing, Damon. Mature slowly. There is so much to learn, in embarking on the greatest program of all time, but you have all time in which to learn."

Damon shook hands and went out. There remained the problem of Wilma.

He drifted down for a landing on her building, and sat for a while in thought. He was beginning a new life, not another in a series of lives. As in everything else, he had also been a dilettante in matrimony.

He recalled a phrase from Dr. Clarke's book: ". . . that glorious road . . . that might reach even to the far glittering stars. Perhaps such a man may rise some day. Perhaps . . ."

Damon activated his machine and took off.

The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

First, I must say that WEIRD TALES seems to be rejuvenated or at least well on the way. These last two issues have shown that especially. And to help things along, the cover by Boris Dolgov on the May issue was very good.

In the fiction department, Wm. F. Temple takes the honors, easily outdistancing all the others. This is the type story that fits WT best. One with really good atmosphere that makes the reader a bit apprehensive at his lonely surroundings. We need more like this one. First yarn in eons that has hit the spot for horror-effect.

Naturally, I like Bob Bloch's story and, I

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might add, its particular type. This goes a long ways in making up the variety of WEIRD TALES.

Even more so do the following stories and the types they exemplify: DJINN AND BITTERS, THE LAST MAN, THE MONKEY SPOONS, MR. HYDE—AND SEEK and THE MAN ON B-17. Too bad that there is that tone of "sameness" about them.

We sure could use more like: THE TRIANGLE OF TERROR, THE LAST THREE SHIPS, CORN DANCE, TWO FACE and such stories. (The caps are for emphasis, by the way.) I realize that in a mag like WT, science-fiction doesn't especially "belong," but, how about weird science-fiction? As with any type of fiction, s-f can be varied.

Ed Cox,
4 Spring Street,
Lubec, Maine

The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

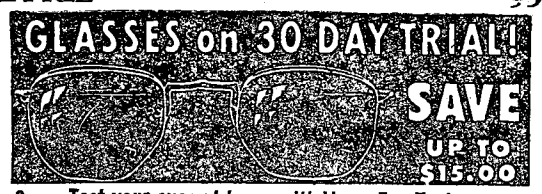
Exquisite is the word for the Dolgov cover on the May issue! There is a faerie charm about it which I find intensely appealing. It is, I believe, your first cover by this capable artist, but let it not be the last. By and large, I am of the opinion that WEIRD TALES is enjoying a renaissance that can lead to great things.

Manly Banister,
Kansas City, Mo.

The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

Ever since I accidentally ran across a copy of WEIRD TALES a few months ago, I have read every issue. Since I live twelve miles from the nearest town deep in the heart of the eastern Kentucky hills, I was afraid I couldn't make it to town every time the magazine went on sale, so I subscribed to it.

So far I have no criticism of any of your stories. Permit me to say a good word for Mary Elizabeth Counselman for the beauty



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CASH FOR WEIRD TALES

I will buy any issues of WEIRD TALES issued before 1932. I also want to buy HORROR STORIES, STRANGE TALES, TERROR TALES, and any collections of Fantastic Magazines and Books. Describe condition and quote price wanted.

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and superb characterization of her stories. Some of her stories are regional and she writes them as smoothly as a gently flowing Kentucky mountain stream.

Quentin R. Howard
Pikeville, Kentucky

The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

I liked your May cover better than most you have had lately. Dolgov's pale colors and delicately weird effect contrast well with the grotesque material WEIRD has been using.

While not wishing to be branded as a "rater," I must say that "Tell Your Fortune" is a fine novelette. Let's have more by William Temple! Also, don't let those only fantasy fans sway your opinion—plenty of us s-f enthusidsts read WEIRD, too. Keep the science-fiction coming!

Morton D. Paley,
New York, N. Y.

The Editor is going to be on a spot in nothing flat on this fantasy; s-f discussion. But we hope to concentrate on good stories. —EDITOR, WEIRD TALES

The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

I've been reading WEIRD TALES for nine years and finally decided to write you.

In your May issue, the story "The Triangle of Terror" had my hair standing on end. Please give us more like it.

There's only one thing wrong with WEIRD TALES and that is: They're not published monthly. Why do you fool around with this bi-monthly stuff?

(Mrs.) Maxyne R. Bauman,
P. O. Box 1208,
Wharton, Texas

That's easy—manufacturing costs are too high.—EDITOR, WEIRD TALES

The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

I disapprove of your policy of cutting out story ratings from your column. After all, how are the other fans going to know whether or not their brethren agree wtih them in their choice of lead stories? Maybe you will start running story ratings again.*

I used to be a regular reader of your magazine back in the early forties. I stopped reading it about 1945, and didn't get another copy till the November, 1949, issue came out. What I saw discouraged me, so I passed up the January, 1950, issue. A sister gave me the March one; this magazine renewed my enthusiasm enough to buy the May issue. I hope to be a regular of yours for several more years.

Robert P. Hodkins,
Lyons Falls, N. Y.

*Maybe this word was bad—we couldn't read the handwriting very well—Editor, WEIRD TALES.

The Editor, WEIRD TALES
9 Rockefeller Plaza, New York 20, N. Y.

Let me be the first to congratulate you, not because you have revived "The Eyrie," but because I've actually seen a beautiful cover on the May issue of the current WEIRD TALES.

Joseph Kankowski,
West Orange, N. J.

New Fan Group

All fans in Southwest Washington are asked to get in touch with either Tom Daniel at Brown-Elmores, or Bill Weeks at 608 West First Sreet, Aberdeen, Washington. A new fan group is being formed, and many activities are planned, such as a club fanzine, instructional and mechanical ideas, etc. A fine gang is being assured of more fun than ever before. No age or other limits.

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